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The current German title of the German version of this ms is:

Bilder meiner Vergangenheit (Pictures of my past)
Ein autobiographischer Bericht (An autobiographical report
Der Familie Herskovits of the family Herskovits)

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Prologue

"And now, beloved Little Ones and dearest Gretelchen, we wish you the very best for the approaching High Holidays. May an eternal peace of justice and understanding arrive for you and all humanity so that true redemption may make its entrance on earth. When that legendary age arrives, peoples of the most diverse faiths, conceptions and opinions will join together for the sole purpose of mutual help and support. Human and other powers of nature and art will serve ends of peace, and human beings will strive only to attain and preserve the palm of peace. Amen." (To his three daughters, September 10, 1939, seven days after the start of World War Two. Original in German)

Our father wrote his letter including his wish for our and the world's redemption at the end of a decade during which life had steadily worsened for the Jews of Germany. His ability, nonetheless, to conjure up a world of such all encompassing peace and perfection is still amazing to me. It is a sad but stern reminder that I did not know him long or well enough. My focus in writing about him can, at best, be a narrow and at times childish one. What I shall say of him here will not do him full justice. Father speaks of the "forces of nature and art" but makes no mention of God. Yet I think that he was guided that day by his faith in God, in a force of all embracing justice and in his often expressed conviction that ultimately "all is for the best." While I know neither the precise nature nor the boundaries of his faith, I have never doubted that he held to his faith and that it guided him during the few years that remained to him.

His faith that "ultimately all is for the best" is the more astonishing because, on a practical level, quite early in the Nazi regime, father was brought face to face with the irrationality and implacability of the demands the new regime made on the Jewish community as a whole and its individual Jews. We only knew that father made us children obey strict rules of behavior and speech, especially but not only in public, and this must have meant that he feared the changes that were occurring in our surroundings. If nothing else, he must have sensed the changed attitude of many of the German officials with whom he had to deal in the course of his work. Despite father's effort to protect us from these developments, Eva and I continued to see many of our later experiences through the prism of that early fear. At the time, unlike our mother who wanted to leave Germany, father's answer to these threats was an ever greater caution and a seemingly endless adaptability.

Father's letter to us is brittle and yellowed. To read it more than sixty years later is to be struck by the wholly unintended irony lurking beneath his well chosen German words. My own and other survivors' experiences and what I saw of the suffering of the many who perished preclude the possibility of such wholehearted faith. I long to be confident that "all shall be well" in my own life and that peace and some measure of reason will prevail in the world, but the indelible images of my experiences often prove stronger.

What I have set down here must, of necessity, be informed and biased by hindsight. But I have tried to strip away the protective layers of the present. I wanted to record as truthfully as I could my memories of our family and our experiences during the Nazi era. The Nazis dictated the shape of our lives and first distorted and then robbed father of his. While his three daughters survived, not one of us did so unscathed.

I have asked myself why I have for so long been reluctant to pass on more than a bare outline of the past to the next generation. Was it because I continued to search for a better understanding of the reasons that lay behind my experiences? Did I simply lack the

courage? Whatever the answer, I needed finally to record some of the memories that I have carried with me for so many years. Such knowledge might help bridge the gap that separates my children not only from the lives and experiences of the grandparents they never knew but also from myself. It might also be of interest to a wider circle of readers to learn about this era from my perspective, that of a daughter of a Jewish official who grew up in Germany during the Nazi years.

Much of the physical backdrop of these events no longer exists. During the Second World War, the city of Hannover, like other German cities, underwent heavy bombing raids in which much of the old housing stock, along with our childhood home, Lützowstrasse 3, was destroyed. A new synagogue was built and opened in 1963 to serve a tiny Jewish congregation. The only reminder of hundreds of years of creative and fruitful Jewish life in the town are an historic memorial hall in the old cemetery that surrounds it and, close to the Opera House, a new memorial to two thousand Jewish men, women and children who have no graves because they were killed or lost in the Holocaust. During the 1990s I visited Hannover several times. While much has changed in the city, most streets, and quite a few stores carry the names I remember from my childhood. There is a beautifully tiled store called "Nordsee" (North Sea), that still sells all kinds of fish products, a place to which we went with our mother on her shopping trips to the center of town, and there is DelAsta, a hundred year old Italian icecream parlor, where one can enjoy excellent pineapple ice to this day.

To my knowledge the archives of the Jewish community that could have opened the whole panorama of our lives, and told much of the thirty-four years of my father's work, have not been found. On my visits I have met a group of Hannover's local historians, both University-based and independent, who continue their painstaking work of many years to piece together the crucial details of what befell the Jews of Hannover during the 1930s and 1940s. Their efforts, such as their research into the multi-layered history of the Jewish Horticultural School in Ahlem, and new research in the just declassified files of the main archive of Lower Saxony, are bound to be of significance for other cities and towns as well.

To document the effects of the gradual, often insidious, intensification of Nazi persecution on our lives, I begin my narrative around 1933 when I was five years old.

Early Years

When I look back, I am never alone. Eva, my twin sister, is always with me. The big curl on top of her head moves in rhythm with the song she is humming, and I sit next to her on a low stool, and move with her. She is cradling my favorite Käthe-Kruse doll in her arms. I take it away from her. She begins to complain loudly. The door opens and a head with thick chestnut brown hair and dark eyes appears. Grete, a tall eleven year old, wants to know why we are making so much noise. She is doing her home work and we are disturbing her. Our mother now comes from the kitchen, drying her hands on her apron. She too looks annoyed and gives Eva another doll to play with. "You should play together and share your toys," she reminds us. Eva's lower lip trembles and she begins to cry. I am holding my doll even closer.

It has stopped raining. Mother has sent the two of us to play in the large backyard downstairs. Worms have appeared between the cobblestones. The schoolbell sounds, signaling the end of the afternoon's religious instruction for the children of the Jewish community. Glad to have escaped the classroom, they will come running downstairs to play in the yard. They won't notice when they step on those worms. I cannot bear to see those stepped-on, wriggling, half dead worms on the ground. With a small twig I carry as many worms as I can find to the concrete base of the fence where they are safe.

* * * * *

Evening. Our father has come upstairs from his office. The lamp with the green metal shade has been lit and pulled low over the kitchen table. Mother has cooked farina for Eva and me, and before she feeds us in turn, she puts a little sugar on each spoon. Grete is doing her homework. Mother hands Vati a mug with coffee and milk. He cuts himself a thick slice of bread and dunks it into the coffee. "Eat bread," he admonishes us. "There is nothing better. It is the staff of life." His head disappears behind his newspaper. When he has finished, he folds up the paper and asks Grete about school. He reminds us that it is almost time for bed. Eva and I beg to be allowed to stay up a little longer so we can finish the checkers game that we are playing. Eva is smiling, she is winning. I am fighting my tears. Vati takes us to the bathroom and runs a bath for us. After he has washed us he wraps us each in a large bathsheet and carries us, one in each arm, through the drafty vestibule, to our beds in our Kinderzimmer. Mother comes in and with a deep sigh pulls up a chair to our beds. She has brought two white flannel caps. She warns us to keep them on our heads until our hair is dry. Then she begins the nightly prayer, and word for word we repeat the Hebrew sounds. She switches off the light and quietly closes the door behind her. I take off my flannel cap. I love to stroke its soft cloth while I suck my thumb and go to sleep.

After Edwin Oppler completed our magnificent synagogue in 1870, the Jewish community of Hanover asked the Jewish architect to build a Memorial Hall for the cemetery and a Gemeindehaus (community house). The latter, a three story-house, was completed in 1875. Our family lived in the private apartment on the top floor. Oppler's drawings show that the Jewish community originally intended to use the building as a school, a plan apparently not approved by the city government. I remember the high, asymetrically placed wooden portal framed by a decorative brick arch whose apex touched the window of the school library on the second floor. Here the children of our

Jewish community got their religious instruction, and Jewish youth organizations and political clubs held their often contentious, noisy meetings. Father, who was the Gemeindesekretär (executive secretary), had his office several steps above ground level to the right of that portal. His and his secretary's desks stood at right angles to the last of four large windows, and the wall behind them contained built-in, floor to ceiling dark brown wooden file cabinets with vertical roll-up doors. Shields of white porcelain labeled the contents of the files. Father and Fräulein Arnstein, his secretary, were always busy; the bookkeeper, Herr Cohnhoff, with the large shiny pate was always pouring over large ledgers with columns of numbers, a lamp with a green glass shade suspended over his desk at the front of the office. Right inside the entrance a rectangular area served as a small waiting room. A couple of benches and low room dividers permitted the visitor or petitioner to discuss matters with father without disturbing the rest of the staff. Unless we had a good reason we children were forbidden to disturb them. But if we could show father a wood splinter in a finger, he'd get up from his desk, come to us in the waiting area and swiftly, blowing on the "injured" finger to lessen the pain, remove the culprit. A door opposite the windows led to the conference room (Sitzungssaal) which was furnished with heavy oak tables and matching chairs decorated with carved garlands. For many years, the Welfare Office was across from father's office, and beyond the glass-walled vestibule with its porter's lodge, Herr Levisohn, the Cemetery Administrator, had his office.

What little I know of my parents' past I gathered from snatches of their conversations and the stories they told us. I must have been quite small, between the ages of five and seven or at most eight, because later they had little time and less ease to tell us of their youth.

Samuel Herskovits, whom, like most German children, we called Vati, was born in Felsoszüik near Cluj (Klausenburg) in a place so small I haven't been able to find it on any map. Although the date was March 3, 1883, his birth certificate read 1881. Religious Jews feared their sons' forced conversion in the military, and would predate a boy's birthdate to make him appear frail for his age. This ploy, which was not uncommon in the 19th century, was intended to help delay or even prevent his conscription. Samu, as he was later to sign his letters to his mother, was the only child of a farmer and his second, much younger wife. His half-brother, Akos, came to America at the turn of the century. A half-sister, Millie, and her family who lived in Rumania, were in all likelihood victims of the Nazis. As a boy father knew only one of his grandmothers, and his only memory of her was that she, like one of the hens in their barnyard, was blind in one eye. And so grandmother and hen had the same nickname. But what that name was has been lost with much else. He confessed that he had been a very mischievous boy who would climb trees to escape his mother's anger. He was at most thirteen when his father died, and his mother sent him to the well-known Sofer Yeshiva in Bratislava (Pressburg)

Father's teenage years were spent at the Yeshiva and, before he was twenty one, he had earned his "Moreno Rav", the rabbinical degree. The poor yeshiva students must have depended upon the local community for their upkeep, for father never forgot how tired he and his friends were of the yellow pea soup they were served day after day in the kitchens of the Kehilla elders. Eventually they took their revenge: they smeared quantities of peas on the synagogue seats of the husbands of those benevolent women. Since secular studies were forbidden, an ambitious student had to study languages and mathematics on the sly. According to one of his classmates, whom Margaret met some fifty years later in London, in the evenings, if he wanted to study, father had to climb over the wall that surrounded the Yeshiva and return by the same route. After he had

earned his degree, he decided that he had neither the wish to practice the minutiae of his faith nor to preach to others to do so. He admired what he had managed to learn of German culture and especially its classical literature, and decided to go to Germany. In Hamburg he attended a business school while working for a cigar maker called Rosenduft whose name I recall because we thought it so funny. In 1909, having earned a business degree (Diplom Kaufmann) he went to Hanover.

Father found employment as a clerk in the office of the Jewish community and never tired of telling us that this achievement was the result of his diligently practiced, excellent penmanship. At the start of the First World War he was drafted by the Austro-Hungarian army and stationed in the garrison town of Theresienstadt. But he saw no frontline service. On a picture of that time he was almost unrecognizable: He had grown a beard and was extremely emaciated. Since there was no kosher food, he had lived on little more than bread and apples. A quarter of a century later he was to renew his acquaintance with the town - and the hunger he had known there earlier.

After the war, in 1919, father married Helene Kiss. I do not know where or how they met, only that his mother had chosen a different wife for him. He told us that he made his own choice when he caught sight of his "intended" while she was busy drowning a litter of new-born kittens.

Mother, called Nuszi (Nooshi) by her family and Mutti by us, was born in Turcz and grew up in Dej. She was one of five daughters and two sons of a wine dealer. Her father was a rigidly observant Jew, in distinction to her mother, who was both tolerant of different views and well educated for a woman of that time. We know that our maternal grandmother's maiden name was Hartmann and that her father had been a "country lawyer" with a wicked sense of humor. Years later, when we visited our mother's youngest sister in Israel, she told us stories of the practical jokes he played: when he saw the peasant girls carry fresh eggs in their aprons to market, he would untie their apronstrings. But she added reassuringly: "he always paid for the damage he had enjoyed causing."

In the early 1920s, after the Jewish communist Bela Kun's aborted revolution in Hungary, our mother's whole family went to Palestine because they feared an antisemitic backlash.¹ Grandmother Charlotte's only worry, documented in a still extant letter to her far-away children in Hanover, was her oldest son who had completed his medical studies and found the climate in Palestine unbearable. He returned to Europe and settled in Prague, a decision that was to cost him and his family their lives. After the Nazi take-over of Czechoslovakia in 1939, Ludwig and his wife and two children fled to Hungary and they seem to have survived to the end of the war. Grandmother Charlotte lived long enough to learn of her son's and his family's death at the hands of the invading Soviet Russians in 1945.

In 1924 when Jacob Hoffmann, the executive secretary of the Jewish community of Hanover, retired (or died), father was promoted to the post, and he and his young wife moved into the private apartment on the third floor of Lützowstrasse 3. Their oldest daughter was born in 1922. Friends of our parents, who, like so many educated German Jews, were admirers of Goethe's Faust, persuaded them to call her Margarete. In 1924 a

¹ Zionist Hungarians were apparently a tiny fraction of the Jews of Hungary. Only 5,629 Hungarian Jews emigrated to Palestine between 1919 and 1945. Holocaust & Genocide Studies, vol.12, no. 1, 1998, p. 167.

set of fraternal twins, Karl Franz and Franziska Klara, followed, and a second set of fraternal twins, Eva and I, in 1928.

Only rarely did I hear my parents speak of the difficulties they are likely to have faced during those early years of their marriage: rampant inflation, the unsettled political situation, and father's increasing responsibilities. Our father's mother and her second husband, a watchmaker called Farkas, had been living with father since 1914. They stayed with the newly weds and left for Palestine in 1925. There they lived near our mother's parents in an old neighborhood called Siebenbürger Häuser (Transylvanian houses), and the two grandmothers, despite their very different temperaments and views, became good friends. After they left, Karlchen, a healthy boy during his first year of life, fell ill (with typhus?) and spent a whole year in the children's hospital, probably because he caught other childhood diseases there, before he died, age two, after terrible suffering. Just at that time, their pediatrician, Dr. Huneus, revealed to our parents that Karlchen's twin sister, Klärchen, had been irreparably injured during her high forceps delivery. It left her retarded and unable to speak. Even as a small child I felt that our mother's sadness was due to these losses. When Eva and I were one year old, our parents decided to board Klärchen with a Christian family on the island of Norderney, a popular vacation resort where the Jewish community maintained a children's convalescent home. From that time on our parents took us on their annual vacations to Norderney so that we could visit Klärchen.

Hanover's Jewish community, like others in Germany, provided a complete framework for the spiritual and physical wellbeing of its members, regardless whether they were of orthodox or liberal persuasion. For some of its members there was little need and few opportunities to deal with the surrounding Christian society. Several old-age homes, a hospital, day-care center and orphanage served all the social needs of the community. This impressive array of facilities was supported by several foundations that had been established by members of earlier generations. All were maintained by a charitable membership that never exceeded 5-6,000. After Hitler came to power and deprived many members of their livelihood, the Jewish community provided opportunities for retraining, and men (and some women), who had been established professionals, became manual laborers and skilled craftsmen. When that concession to the persecution by the National Socialists proved in vain, the Jewish community established an office to help its members emigrate. Soon after Jews were excluded as performers and audiences from all cultural pursuits in German society, a nation-wide organization of traveling Jewish artists gave concerts, plays, and lectures. In addition, local Jewish artists did their share to provide cultural fare and a variety of diversions for members of the Jewish community.

Like similar organizations, the Jewish community lost its resources in the notorious inflation after World War I. Father's first task as Gemeindesekretär was to document the financial status of the members of the congregation. Under German law, he became the Jewish community's first tax officer and as such was considered a public employee. Since Germany had no separation of Church and State, the Jewish communities were taxed by the State and a percentage of this Church tax was returned to them, as to other religiously affiliated organizations, for the activities of the congregation. Thus, sworn to secrecy, Father had access to the files of the Office of Finance (Finanzamt). Instead of using estimates, the community could now base its tax schedule on factual information. In August 1934, at father's 25th anniversary celebration, Kommerzienrat Joseph Berliner, head of the Jewish community, singled out this task of

father's for special praise -- because with skill and absolute discretion he had managed to overcome the understandable resistance of his community to this new development. According to the Jüdische Nachrichtenblatt - the primary source for community news - which reported on the festivities, Kommerzienrat Berliner stressed father's absolute reliability and exceptional memory for detail.

Perhaps it was father's discretion that helped restrain his sharp wit, and to deal daily, patiently, with the varied needs of the members of the community. His own needs, shaped in the rural society of his youth, were very simple. And although he insisted on the same unpretentiousness in his family life, he was surprisingly tolerant of the very different values espoused by some of the members of our community. While I knew that father was exceptionally generous with his and his family's resources, this was confirmed for me when I read a letter he wrote to Margarete in August 1939. She had recently arrived in England and written him worriedly that she owed money for postage to the family with whom she was staying. He responded by assuring her:

"You can tell them not to worry about those few pennies. Between the years 1924 and 1939 we gave people in need 60,000 mark. It was two-thirds of my salary. Once I am abroad.... they will get it back with compound interest."²

His sympathy for and active support of the poor far exceeded his duties as secretary of the community. Frequently when poor individuals came to him, he helped them with his own resources rather than "shaming" them by a referral to the Welfare office where, he complained in another letter to Grete, they were not treated with sufficient sympathy just when they were most in need of it.

Probably related to father's generosity was mother's extreme frugality. Many of her and all of our own clothes were made at home during the monthly visits of a professional seamstress who taught mother the secrets of her trade. A wool coat she had worn for 19 years was turned inside out and re sewn to be worn some more. Later I was allowed to draw pictures of the designs Eva and I liked and Mother did her best to reproduce them for us.

While this was uncommon for men at the time, father took an active part in our upbringing and daily care. Father often bathed us and put us to bed, spanked us when we were out of bounds or otherwise made him angry, and checked that we were comfortable and warm at night. And in the morning he got us up, prepared our breakfast and got us ready for school.

Father never stopped learning. From the typewriter repairman he learned the workings of typewriters and how to repair them. This was to stand him in good stead when, because of the racial laws, it became first difficult and later impossible to employ Christian workers, and he could fix both his own and the machines used in his office. He continued to study foreign languages. During the 1930s he concentrated on English. In the early 1940s, until we were deported, he studied Italian. He probably realized that he would have no more opportunity to use his English--but he still had his music and quite a few of the texts were in Italian. He also studied and vocalized the nineteenth century liturgical works of Sulzer and Lewandowski - some of which were familiar to us from our synagogue services - and he taught himself the Lieder of Schubert, Brahms, Grieg, and Wolf.

² All quotations are from letters in my possession.

We were returning from our fifth annual vacation in Norderney in the summer of 1933, when we learned that this visit would have to be our last. The new Nazi government had issued a decree forbidding Jews the use of beaches and spas. These places were among the first to be made "judenrein" (cleansed of Jews).³ Our father assured us that there were many more beautiful places we could visit. We were to have other opportunities to observe his facility for finding a "remedy" for the ever increasing restrictions and prohibitions that were to circumscribe our life because of what had now become a major problem: We were Jews.

1933-35

Sometimes on our walks with Vati we went to a sweetshop on Theodorstrasse owned by the Brechner family. Frau Brechner, a small, gray-haired woman, opened the door to her store which was located below street level. She was pleased to see us. She gave Vati a playful hug and, in the German custom, pinched our cheeks to the point of pain. She asked that he sing something for her. More pleased with our reception than we were, he laughed and obliged with a short Yiddish song. Then he purchased one of those large pound-size tins of green eucalyptus candy that he kept in his office. The sticky candy with the pungent taste helped him fight his frequent sore throats, and he never stopped recommending them to us. He knew we preferred Frau Brechner's marzipan Kartoffeln ("potatoes"), small, fragrant, cocoa-dusted balls. For Chanukah we bought her tiny green and yellow candy dragees that we used as chips when we played dreidle.

We were just leaving the Brechner's shop after one of these shopping expeditions when, in rapid succession, we heard strange popping sounds. These were interspersed by intervals of total silence. We asked father what it might be, but he only gripped our hands a little tighter and told us to hurry to get home. As soon as our heavy front door closed behind us, he explained to Eva and me that some people were quarreling and fighting it out on the street. Soon enough we learned that these street fights and shootings were in fact Parteikämpfe - fights among different political parties during the election campaign which preceded Hitler's accession to power in January 1933. Many of these fights had been instigated by the local Nazi storm troopers (the SA).

Other sights and sounds became familiar, regular occurrences. From the window of our Kinderzimmer (children's room) I watched columns of these SA men in kaki uniforms, black swastikas on white circles on their bright red armbands, flags aloft, marching on Goethestrasse. In perfect unison they sang the Horst Wessel Lied and other Nazi songs. Traffic came to a stop. Long after those marchers had disappeared, the rhythmic sound of their jack boots on the pavement seemed to reverberate in our room. If Eva and I were on our rollerskates or scooters when the SA marched by, we instinctively hurried inside. Once in a while we sought shelter in father's office. Vati would get up from his desk and meet us in the waiting area. He offered us one of his eucalyptus candies and encouraged us to go back to our play.

³ The Nazi Minister of Culture, Bernhard Rust, visited Norderney on July 23, 1933 and demanded that the Island be finally reserved for Germans only. Another campaign in 1934 requested that all (resident) Jews leave the Island. Dr. Marlis Buchholz kindly supplied the facts to confirm this early memory.

Our father must have loved his life in Hanover, he loved the German language and the country. He had made a life for himself and for his family by his own efforts, and he would not listen to his wife who wanted to join her parents and five siblings in Palestine. Our parents had many discussions about the direction our lives should take, and mother did not always suffer defeat gladly or in silence. Even when I was quite small, I was certain that there was profound disagreement between them. I watched them, trying to understand what they were saying to each other in that strange Hungarian language they spoke. Mother's face was mask-like in her effort to remain calm. Behind his steel-framed glasses, father's dark eyes appeared even darker. Suddenly, with a flourish, he'd sing a passage from a Hungarian song and repeat it in a higher key. The low-ceilinged kitchen could barely contain his voice. Mother looked pained. Then, with his thumb and index finger, he extracted the small tuner he always carried in his vest pocket. He adjusted it and checked his pitch. That ended their conversation.

Father may have been reluctant to start over again in another country. While his cantorial skills could well have been usable abroad, his experience as executive secretary of the Jewish community would not have been as portable. Such thoughts must have been on his mind, but they were not expressed until the summer of 1939 when time had essentially run out.

And yet, father was keenly aware of the world of politics. When the Hannoversche Tageblatt printed a picture of a smiling Franklin Delano Roosevelt in his open convertible - perhaps on his way to his inauguration - father showed it to me with the words: "He will help us because he will counterbalance what is happening here." To please him, I had started to look at the daily paper. At five or six I could not have grasped the hope or even certainty father was expressing. But that picture and the occasion engraved itself on my memory.

He helped other families to emigrate to Palestine. Many were poor Eastern Jews who had large families. Sometimes their creditors appeared at the railroad station to claim payment or to prevent their departure. Frequently it was father who prevented altercations by promising to liquidate such debts so that the family could leave. Sometimes they would leave some left over merchandise with him from the stores they had sold before their departure. Once he came home with a large box of all left-handed woolen gloves, and he joined in our laughter when we saw the "present" he had received. Regularly he visited the wealthier members of the congregation, like the Thalheimers, to ask them for funds to help poor families emigrate. Many responded generously, well beyond their regular taxes and their other contributions to the Jewish community.

Mother was often pensive and sad. She missed her family, and their regular correspondence did not make up for their separation. In 1935, in Jerusalem, while he officiated at a Sabbath service, mother's father collapsed and died. For weeks father managed to keep this news from mother. When she finally learned of her father's death, she was overwhelmed by grief. I had never seen her so distraught, her features swollen beyond recognition. She had not seen her father since her marriage in 1919. And because she was told so late of his death, she could not observe the week-long shiva, the customary period of mourning.

Unlike father, who did not read novels and for whom literature seemed to stop with the German classics, mother read avidly. She liked nineteenth century French novels and kept volumes of Balzac's Human Comedy on her bedside table. She also read the stories by writers like Mendele Mocher Sforim, Sholom Aleichem, and I.L.

Peretz. Her reading may have helped her cope with her difficult life, but if she learned to be philosophical or even resigned, I saw these attitudes instantly undone when her unhappiness got the upper hand.

Father loved music, especially vocal music which he studied assiduously. In the nineteen twenties he took singing lessons with a teacher he called "the good Hans Emge." Years later from liner notes of a Gerhard Huesch Lieder album, I learned that Huesch, a well-known Hanoverian, had been a pupil of the same Emge, whom he praised as an exceptional voice teacher. As father recalled in a letter to Grete in 1940, Emge taught him to "treat his voice as if it were fine silk." We children became familiar with the names and voices of many of the famous singers of the time. While we did not have a radio in the 1930s - perhaps a precaution of father's to avoid being accused of listening to forbidden foreign broadcasts - he never tired of turning the crank on the grammophone. We would listen to recordings of arias and Lieder, sung by Tauber, Schlusnus, Caruso, Scotti, Kipnis, Galli-Curci, Alper, Gigli, and others. Father taught us the liturgy, mostly composed by Sulzer and Lewandowski, sung in our synagogue. To demonstrate the art of the cantor, he played recordings of Sirota and Rosenblatt. I think that father's singing at the weekly Sabbath service and the annual cycle of holidays was a blend of the art of the cantor and the heart of the chazzan. Some of the Eastern Jewish members of the congregation, who had their own services in several small "Stibel" (Yiddish for a small room), would come to listen to him after the end of their own, shorter services. With us our father sang Hebrew and Yiddish songs and encouraged us to harmonize and sing in rounds. He was delighted when he discovered that Eva, who had a lovely and strong voice, easily scaled the high C.

On many Sunday afternoons in summer, we walked to a Schrebergarten -- a cultivated plot outside city limits -- owned (or rented) by friends, the family Kaunitz. For us children it was a long walk, and we amused ourselves by running our hands along the interminable green hedges that bordered the road. Some of these bore a white round fruit we called Knallerbsen (a popping pea). We stopped to step on them and hear them go "pop". If we dallied too much, Vati urged us along by promising us ice cream, which he bought us from street vendors who scooped it into small boat-shaped biscuits.

The Kaunitz family and their friends were of Austrian and Czech origin. They and their circle were comfortably situated business people who owned several mens wear and hat shops. In the shade of a large chestnut tree the men played Skat (a card game) while the women did their sewing or embroidery. Mother brought along hard boiled eggs and sandwiches, in the hope that the fresh air would stimulate our appetite. With the Kaunitz's three sons and other youngsters, we picked raspberries and other fruit. I took the blind grandmother of family Hahn around the garden and described to her the flowering shrubs that bordered the paths. Eva and I collected caterpillars in a small glass jar and were disappointed when we did not find butterflies the next day. Before we went home, Herr Kaunitz shared the ripe corn - which he called "Kukurutz," with his friends.

We were probably one of the few families in Hanover to consider green peppers and corn a treat. Generally in Germany corn was thought fit for animal feed only. This was not the only instance in which our family's ways were slightly "eccentric," traceable to Hungarian customs. At times we children felt "different," a feeling reinforced by our mother's slightly accented speech and uncertain use of the difficult rules of German grammar.

Our parents' own foreign background may have made it easier for them to understand and sympathize with the Eastern Jews of our community. Most of them were among the poorer members of the congregation. Almost invariably they were strict

observers of the Jewish laws. Many German Jews looked askance at the foreign ways of the "Ostjuden." It was not uncommon to hear the surely spurious charge that it was the Eastern Jews who, by their demeanor and obvious "otherness," had helped to intensify, if not indeed introduce, antisemitism. These opinions and prejudices of their parents were often reflected in the behavior of some of the older boys who attended the Jewish afternoon school in our house. They belonged to clubs and organizations like Agudah, Mizrahi, Habonim, Hashomer Hatzair or Werkleute whose political and religious orientation ran the gamut from right to left. Sharp differences of opinion among these young people sometimes led to physical clashes. Often father had to go upstairs to quieten them and, if possible, to make peace.

A man of strong opinions that, at least at home, he rarely hesitated to express, father had many friends among members of the congregation, especially those who appreciated those characteristics. But we children were aware that there were those who strenuously opposed him. We did not understand the meaning or subject of the disagreements he had with some of the functionaries of the community, but his thinking was clearly different from that of some of his colleagues. We often heard his frustration with the inadequacies of the welfare office, and the office charged with helping members emigrate seems to have been similarly deficient.

In 1934 and again in 1935 we took our vacation in Barsinghausen, a small village near Hanover. We children enjoyed our stay even though Eva and I took turns getting the measles - assuring that mother's entire vacation would be spent looking after us. Father collected berries, and mother had to both nurse us and put up jams and juices. We were very lucky: the ice cream man lived in the same house and we not only watched him, with endless fascination, crank his ice cream machine, but became good customers. Mother made bread (Semmel) which Grete took to the village baker to be baked in his oven.

School

When Eva and I were five we received a brand new Hebrew prayerbook (a sidur). For once we were not asked to share a possession. Then we were introduced to Herr Levisohn, who administered the Jewish cemeteries. With great patience he taught us the rudiments of Hebrew. Soon we were able to read the morning and evening prayers that our mother had been saying with us almost since we began to talk. Once the Jewish Day school was established, our Hebrew studies, such as they were, became part of our curriculum.

Eva managed to amuse father in many ways. We were allowed to watch the many Jewish weddings at which he officiated in the conference room next to his office. We knew the crucial prayer the husband would have to repeat. Once, when a prospective husband seemed rather slow, or as the grownups would later have it, reluctant, to repeat the words spoken by father: "Hare at mekudeshes li",... (Behold thou art consecrated to me [by this ring].) Eva, always impatient, piped up with the next word. Later she was scolded although it was quite plain to us that father was actually proud of her quick mind.

In the fall of 1934 father enrolled us in the local elementary school. Our first grade teacher was the same Fräulein Firnhaber who six years earlier taught our sister Grete. We got the traditional Zuckertüte (a large colorful cone shaped bag filled with sweets), a leather satchel and lunch bag. On the way father took us to the photographer. As on all our pictures, Eva's face is grave, and I smile. And as always, the sleeves of her

blouse are too short for her long arms. Eva and I sat in one of the last rows of the classroom. That first day the classroom looked enormous to me and the teacher was a tiny figure in the distance. We began learning to read and write and Fräulein Firnhaber gave us dictation exercises. One day when mother called for us I was very upset. We had had to write the sentence: "*Alle Kinder rufen Heil Hitler*" (All children call out Heil Hitler). I misspelled his name "Hilter". I had failed the test. Mutti dried my tears and promised not to tell father. From then on I often sat with her in the kitchen and practiced my reading and writing. While she was deftly removing the last bits of fat from the entrails of a chicken - in order to utilize it all to the fullest - , she would glance at the words that gave me trouble and encourage me to try again.

My school books and the newspapers I saw contained many pictures of blond, pigtailed little girls who curtsied when they greeted Hitler. And wherever he went, they handed him bunches of flowers. Sometimes I wished I were one of them. But my hair was brown and short, and I felt guilty when I tried to imagine what it would be like not to be Jewish.

To imagine oneself "outside" one's family was very disloyal, and I told no one of these thoughts. I had heard father talk with scorn of those who attempted to save themselves by leaving the Jewish community. "Hitler has done one good thing," he would say, "he has shown us Jews that neither baptism nor assimilation will make people feel differently about us. Neither is the answer to our problem." *What* the answer was he did not say. This was all the more puzzling since, unlike mother, he was not a Zionist. Such questions remained dormant in me for many years before I learned that the answer lies in the mutual acceptance of the different beliefs and attributes of people. But I have not ceased to wonder at father's seeming acceptance of the inevitability of our Jewish fate and the suffering it imposed on us.

At the end of our first school year, our parents told Eva and me that we would not be returning to the local elementary school (Volksschule) in the fall. We were to be enrolled in a recently organized Jewish Day School on the second, and later also the first floor of our house instead. Many of our teachers had advanced degrees; they taught us because they had lost their jobs in the German secondary and high school systems. Others, like Werner Weinberg,⁴ were just starting their teaching careers. We had small classes and made good progress. But going to school in the same house in which we lived and where father had his office had its distinct drawbacks. If we failed to behave "perfectly", Herr Wigdorowitch, our fifth grade teacher, routinely threatened that he would go straight to father's office to report our misdeeds. And sometimes he did just that. In school I was more obedient than Eva. She had trouble waiting her turn and blurted out the answers to arithmetic problems when she grew impatient with a slower classmate. Perhaps because she was easily bored, Eva did not enjoy her school work as much as I. As a result her grades tended to be lower than mine. Once when our teacher met father in the stairwell and complained about Eva, I happened to be standing one flight above them and, unseen, overheard father's response: "Eva is intelligent, Ruth is diligent." It hurt me, although I thought he made the distinction to defend Eva.

The Three of Us

It was a general practice in our family to assign talents to us children: Eva could sing and Ruth could draw. We would not have dreamt of switching talents or roles, or,

⁴ Dr. Weinberg, who later emigrated to Holland from where he was deported to Bergen-Belsen, left a memoir: *Self-Portrait of a Holocaust Survivor*, McFarland, Jefferson, 1985.

even less imaginable, invade each other's territory. Grete, who played the piano, was said to be in a class by herself. I accepted this judgment, I think because she was our "big sister", and that was how we -- sometimes boastfully -- referred to her when we spoke to our friends. If our parents had visitors, Grete was asked to play the piano for them. Reluctantly she complied. When Eva was asked to sing, she went into the adjacent Herrenzimmer (the study) where she felt safe and invisible, and her clear, high voice easily penetrated the dividing door to the Speisezimmer (dining room) where our parents' guests were being entertained. I did not mind showing my drawings and these were duly admired.

Grete was always playing the piano. Her lessons had begun when she was six, but the combination of school work and piano practice was considered too stressful and the piano was discontinued until she was nine. I enjoyed listening to her, crouched under the grand piano in the dining room. Brahms' Intermezzi were my special favorites. They evoked a pleasantly pensive mood in me which I was able to recreate by just humming one of the melodies. At one of the congregation's cultural events, Eva and I, dressed in the obligatory pink crepe paper dresses, with Grete at the piano, sang Brahms lovely lullaby: "*Die Blümelein sie schlafen*" (the flowers are asleep).

Grete could continue her studies at the local Schiller Lyceum whose director, Herr Plath, gave proof of uncommon courage: he wore an SDP button (Sozial Demokratische Partei) in his lapel at a time when this could be a dangerous gesture and the majority displayed Nazi insignia. Father forbade Grete to tarry after school, and one day when she disobeyed that rule, our parents suffered agonies until she returned home. Tall for her age and six years our senior, our parents seemed to expect perfect behavior from her. In any event, from that time on, father's first question upon coming upstairs from his office was: "Where is our big girl?" It was the first Hungarian phrase I learned.

On walks we were continually admonished to be well behaved and not to call attention to ourselves. If we played outdoors in the very small front garden, we were frequently subjected to verbal taunts. "We are proud to be Jews" we usually answered when kids across the street called us "Jew pigs". Our parents told us to play in the backyard instead and to be very careful: "Pretend that you did not hear and do not answer back."

Of course we knew that we were not pigs or any of the other things we and other Jews were being called. To have it pounded into us by the newspaper, by signs on walls, stores and park benches that we were evil, not to be trusted and not wanted, created a constant need to oppose at least silently the assertions made by the surrounding society. If, as sometimes happened, a Jew should indeed be found to have broken a law, it was an extremely painful event because it threatened to weaken our resolve to disbelieve the image that had been created of us. These tensions also complicated our parents' relations with us. They feared that we might be indiscreet in casual contact with non-Jews - although only Grete had such contacts in school - and chose not to discuss their feelings toward the National Socialist regime with us. Consequently they did not sufficiently criticize the evil intent and nature of those who maligned us. Father, especially, sought more than anything to shield us, but that effort resulted more often than not in a lack of candor with us.

Shortly after Hitler came to power - this was spoken of as the "*Umbruch*" - Jews were forbidden to employ non-Jewish household help under the age of forty-five. We lost our long-time sleep-in girl. While an older woman came to do the laundry and heavier cleaning, mother found it difficult to adjust to these changed conditions. She frequently complained of overwork. The porter who had looked after the offices and the

heating of the house also had to leave. Father now serviced the heating system himself and insisted that shoveling coal was excellent exercise for him. Because Grete's piano practice and school work were deemed too important to interrupt, Eva and I were recruited to help mother with the dishes. We were to take turns drying them and bickered a lot because we could never remember whose turn it was. I could see that this only upset mother more. But I could not understand her reaction when we happened to break a dish while drying it. It was not particularly costly porcelain. But it came natural to her to express herself with a great deal of drama, even exaggeration. She would raise her arms in despair, exclaiming: "What have I done to deserve such clumsy children?" I felt true sympathy for her most of the time and tried to help, but these exclamations made me very unhappy. Her question confirmed my conviction that if anything painful happened to me, it was the deserved consequence of some evil action or thought of mine.

These outbursts and her complaints of overwork were probably expressions of what she felt about a whole constellation of blows that fate had dealt her. Despite father's attempts to humor or reassure her that "all will be well," - a frequently repeated expression of his - she was often brooding. At other times, as I watched my parents converse in Hungarian, I would see a beautiful open smile transform mother's serious features. I could not understand what they were saying, nor did I know what remark of father's made her smile. I did not mind. It was enough to see her smile. I was happy.

If I wanted to be close to mother, I had to seek her out in her domain. I went to her in the kitchen and offered to help with her baking and other tasks. She was busy making several kinds of fancy tortes for one of our obligatory birthday parties. My interest in her work earned me her praise and the prediction that I would make a good homemaker when I grew up. Eva, who was often feuding with mother, took less interest in her activities, and thus deprived herself of the closeness and warmth I felt.

Our rivalry for our father's approval was intense long before we went to school. When Eva and I quarreled, he was judge not only of our behavior but of our intentions. Frequently he seemed to rule in her favor, perhaps because he knew that she was physically weaker than I. And I felt miserable if he decided that it was I who had started our fight. Although he occasionally allowed that both of us might be at fault, my conscience was rarely clear because I was well aware of the feelings of jealousy that frequently overcame me. And because I did not have Eva's quicksilver mind and was slow with words, I was all the quicker with my fists.

Sometimes Grete would enter the fray to try and reestablish quiet - if not peace. Eva and I, instantly united, insisted that we had not fought at all and offered some lame excuse. We had our own private peace-making routine: we never went to sleep before saying to each other: "Let's be friends again." We always agreed. Eva would put her long skinny arms around me, and, reconciled, we went to sleep.

Grete was more successful when she instituted reading aloud to us. On Saturday afternoons when our parents rested, she was charged with keeping us occupied and quiet. She must have been studying Moliere in school because she decided that he would do just fine for Eva and me. She sat us down on two low stools in the living room and from a thin Reklam book read a German translation of *Le Malade Imaginaire*. We laughed so hard, it woke our parents.

There was no dispute among us who was father's favorite. It was and remained Grete. Although it was for the purpose of practice, their English conversations shut out mother and Eva and me. When I heard father and Grete discuss some point in her reading or school work, I tried hard to understand their conversation. My solution was to

read her books, which I slipped under my more innocuous "Nesthäckchen" (the family's youngest). Many times Grete would notice and confiscate her book. At others I managed to read quite undisturbed Schiller's play "Kabbale und Liebe" - the title was irresistible. I gobbled up other, equally unsuitable, works. But always, half way through the book when my curiosity and anxiety got the upper hand, I would turn to its last pages to learn how it ended. And so I cried long before the story had reached the point to warrant my sympathy and unhappiness. Reading about the Crusades of the Middle Ages and visualizing their effect on the hapless Jewish communities of that time was a horrifying experience for me. It was impossible to make sense of the stories of the Spanish Inquisition or, for that matter, of the blood libel for which the Jews were persecuted for centuries. These stories convinced me that the lives of Jews were ineluctably different from the rest of humanity. But while I read enough to become quite frightened by this history, the time never came for me to join father and Grete in their conversations.

I had long enjoyed drawing and made my first acquaintance with the visual arts when father gave me a Max Liebermann biography, a book that was among the gifts he had received at his anniversary celebration in 1934. Liebermann, an assimilated well-to-do German Jew, was one of Germany's best known but "unconventional" painters who had helped develop German impressionism. One of Liebermann's drawings appealed to me especially because it depicted the last two lines of a dramatic Goethe ballad: "Halb zog sie ihn, halb sank er hin und ward nicht mehr gesehn." (Loosely translated, the demise of a fisherman who succumbs to the lures of a mermaid who drags him down to a watery grave.) Liebermann promptly became my favorite painter -- since he was the only one I knew. (To my delight, in 1997, a beautiful self-portrait of Liebermann, dating to the year 1926, was loaned by its German owner to the Fogg Museum in Cambridge. I could visit it and indulge in my memories.)

1936-1937

Father became "erster Kantor" (first cantor) following the emigration of Oberkantor Alter to South Africa. A young assistant cantor, Dr. Isaac Vanderwalde was hired. Dr. Vanderwalde also taught in our school. Eva and I began to attend choir rehearsals with our father. Eventually we were allowed to sing in the mixed choir. After Sabbath services, we, together with the other members of the choir, made our way down the steep stairs of the turrets flanking the imposing entrance to our synagogue. Quickly, Eva and I slipped into the large, now empty, sanctuary. We were headed for the small room all the way up front to the right of the ark where father removed his robe and cap. The room also held the built-in safe to which all silver ornaments were returned after services. When he felt that he had sung particularly well, father was in high spirits and greeted us with a big smile. He called us his "Puppen", (dolls) and we helped him put his cap and robe away. Meanwhile he was exchanging stories with Herr Roberg, the reader and beadle of the congregation. A short man with a pointed beard, he bustled in and out of the dressing room, opened the safe and carefully replaced the Torah crowns with their ringing bells and shields, and the pointers that had been used to read the Torah. Occasionally a tarrying member of the congregation looked in to shake father's hand with a "Yeashir kochacho!" (literally: May your strength increase; the customary Hebrew phrase for "thank you" on such occasions).

Our religious observances, the Saturday afternoon services and activities, and Chanukah and Purim theatricals organized by our Rabbi, Dr. Emil Schorsch, became an important part of our lives. Dr. Schorsch had for years made it his goal to provide the youth of our community with both spiritual and cultural stimulation. (His son is the present Chancellor of the Jewish Theological Seminary.) There were few other

diversions. We did not go to movies or concerts. We were ten in 1938 when we saw our first and only movie in Germany - Shirley Temple's "Recruit Williy Winkie.". Except for Sunday afternoon walks with Grete to DelAsta, an ice cream parlor on Goethestrasse where we were treated to delicious pineapple sorbet, we never went to a cafe, and never ate a meal in a restaurant. Our parents may have avoided such activities for their own reasons; the pervasive antisemitism, expressed on large signs that read "Juden unerwünscht" (Jews not wanted) on many establishments in the city, and others equating Jews with pickpockets and rapists, had to be a crucial factor.

It was impossible to avoid passing the wood-framed glass cases on nearby streets which displayed the Stürmer. The German populace was being encouraged to enjoy reading Julius Streicher's rag, published exclusively for the purpose of spouting hate for and untruths about the "dangerous and obscene Jews". The caricatures of Jews almost defied description. Their noses resembled beaks, out of proportion to the rest of their facial features except for their lips which were thick and curled outward. Their tiny eyes squinted slyly. No member of our family or friends, no one I had ever seen looked remotely like those pictures. Probably to counteract those distorted images of Jews all around us, father told us of Jews in other countries of whom we could be proud: Hore-Belisha was Secretary of War in the British government; Leon Blum, Prime Minister of France. Interestingly, he avoided mention of the long list of Jews who, before Hitler's rise to power, had played a variety of significant roles in government, industry and the arts in our own country. Perhaps if he had reminded himself of the evident deterioration of Jewish life in Germany, he might have come to a different conclusion about our ability to continue our life in Germany. Perhaps it was too painful for him, and might have compelled him to agree with our mother who wanted, above all else, to leave.

Even now, having lived in the United States for half a century, the total absurdity of the environment of the 1930s in which we were trying to live is difficult to fathom -- let alone describe.

Religion

I often worried about my parents' very different ideas of what constituted proper religious observance, and it hurt me to see them disagree. Our mother took a strict, orthodox view while father gave us many opportunities to observe his more liberal attitudes. Because his primary means for relaxation was his music, and even though this greatly distressed our mother, on Friday nights he occasionally went into his study to listen to his records. Over the years I came to understand that father's practices were the result of his interpretation of the meaning of Judaism, while mother's piety, though based on her deep love for her pious father, was also an admixture of old custom and even older superstition. And although I feared God's wrath for my real and imagined misdeeds, I began to realize that God often failed to notice, or to care about my good or bad actions. But that did not ease my bad conscience.

We were returning from synagogue one Saturday morning when we were stopped by a shabbily dressed, poor Jew who had had the misfortune of arriving too late Friday evening to find shelter. Like so many others he was probably a traveling salesman. Father asked him to accompany us home. He unlocked his office, showed the man where cash was kept in the safe and told him what amount to take. Amazed by this action, we asked father for an explanation. He told us that it was really quite simple: his obligation

to help this man, or in general, to save a life, was greater than his obligation to obey the law to observe the Sabbath. This man had needed his help.⁵

"No [German] bureaucrat in 1933 could have predicted what kind of measures would be taken in 1938, nor was it possible in 1938 to foretell the configuration of the undertaking in 1942." (Vol. 1, p. 53).

"...At first the concept of Jew was defined; then the expropriatory operations were inaugurated; third, the Jews were concentrated in ghettos; finally, the decision was made to annihilate European Jewry." (Ibid, p.53).

Hilberg's first statement expresses a belief in the contingent nature of historical events, while the second, of which there are many in his text, purports to describe German Jewry's inexorable march into its doom. Hilberg levels severe accusations against the German Jewish leadership for failing to foresee that escalation and their own eventual destruction that he, Hilberg, sees so plainly in these processes twenty five years later. He decries the time-tested remedies they used, attempting to appease the Nazis by answering their demands for information. But these Jewish men could no more imagine the enormity of what lay ahead than the Nazi bureaucrats who made these demands on them. I have tried not to let these accusations by Hilberg and others color my personal recollections of the effects of the Nuremberg laws on our lives and especially on the life of our father.

It took some years for the consequences of those "definitions" and the ordinances of the Nuremberg laws, promulgated on September 15, 1935, to make themselves felt. For father, it was a time of increasing pressures. The German officials whom he called either "Die Behörde", (the authorities, i.e., his euphemism for the Gestapo, i.e., Geheime Staatspolizei or Secret State Police) or simply, "Die Schlägerstrasse" (the street in Hanover where their offices were located) requested that he supply information on all the Jews of Hanover who were members of the Jewish community. He had to furnish proof that, after a certain date, those married to non-Jews no longer belonged to the Jewish community. This was in their interest, and in many cases saved their, and their children's lives in later years. Matters became much more complicated when several generations and their "mixed" offspring were involved. Much of it must have amounted to legal hairsplitting. When a couple wished to get married for example, proof of pure Jewish ancestry on both sides had to be furnished. Often this was difficult to obtain. But without such evidence they would not be allowed to marry. Frequently these tasks were continued during long evening hours at Gestapo headquarters in the Schlägerstrasse. When father returned home later and later our mother was unable to hide her anxiety from us. Grete waited up with her while she sent Eva and me to bed. Even though Grete eventually came to join us, we could not sleep because we knew that father had not yet come home. Eva tossed in her bed, sobbing. Though we might not cry, Grete and I shared her fear that some evil had befallen him. After a while, Eva would get out of bed. Barefoot, in her nightgown she stood on the dark stone staircase and called out disconsolately: "Vati, Vati, do please come home!"

⁵ At that time men and women were picked up on the streets of Germany if there was any suspicion that they were "Landstreicher", i.e., homeless persons. Prison sentences often resulted in eventual incarceration in one of the early concentration camps. Father's statement that his action was intended "to save a life" has to be understood with that background in mind.

These were the years when German Jews sought accommodation with the Nazi regime. Many did not know that accommodation would be impossible. In part, this ignorance may have been choice. Or, at the very least, it was an understandable inability to comprehend the full dimensions of the evil represented by Nazism. Gradually some Jews may even have become inured to the successive anti-Jewish measures which had begun by restricting some aspects of their lives and eventually dictated every moment of it. All the while, like in earlier times in their history, the Jews hoped to avert new blows by proving their usefulness and upright citizenship. While each new law inflicted fresh pain, it also catalyzed their resolve to hold out, to make do with what was left. Some of the newly promulgated laws actually created the illusion that the German government intended to continue to "tolerate" its Jewish citizens albeit under much reduced circumstances. So the Jews absorbed the insults, ignored the absurdities, and tried not to see the threats implicit in each pronouncement of the regime. Those who realized that the Nazis' unrelenting hatred of the Jews was more than an intensification of endemic German antisemitism fled - if they were fortunate enough to have that opportunity.

If father understood this, his very pronounced reticence resulted in not confiding even in his wife. As he always explained to us: his title "Gemeindesekretär" meant he was a "Geheimhalter", someone who kept secrets. If mother had been better informed, her demand that the family go to Palestine would have been even more insistent and better founded. Though father did not speak of these matters to mother, I believe that mother saw that his fears for the future of the Jewish community and his own family weighed heavily on him. And so, despite his silence, as her own worries intensified, her demands that he "do something" increased, and their differences widened. The atmosphere in our house became charged with her sighs and - not always silent - rebuke.

In the spring of 1936 our father fell ill. Removed from us children, he spent almost four weeks in our dining room, and aside from mother, only the doctor and his secretary were allowed to see him. We were told that father had an abscess in his throat which he refused to have lanced. This was one explanation. But behind it in the recesses of my memories there lurks another: father was suffering from mental exhaustion and this was caused by overwork - was it a result of those Nuremberg laws? Those laws meant no less than that the very existence and whereabouts of every single Jew, half-Jew, or quarter-Jew was now documented in every city, town and hamlet of Germany. Apparently because of his position it fell to father to work with the Gestapo to achieve that goal in Hanover. It was at that time that we first heard father mention names like Herr (Vinzent) Olejnik and Herr (Christian) Heinrichsmeier, Gestapo officials working in a specific Jewish department, with whom he had to work during those long evenings.

That summer we went to Siusi (Seis) in the Dolomites, and father recovered his health. He climbed mountains - a new source of anxiety for both mother and Eva - and he seemed cheerful and fulfilled. To the chagrin of our mother, he forgot the fast of Tisha b'Av. He had taken us on a long walk and when we children got tired and hungry, father stopped with us at a small wayside inn. He treated us to cake and mineral water dispensed by a siphon, a new experience for us. Refreshed and happy, we came home to tell mother of our adventure. When mother heard our story, she threw up her hands. Father had failed to remember an important fast day. Her unhappiness cast a shadow on what had been a wonderful afternoon for us.

It was also the summer of the Berlin Olympic Games, and father bought the Berliner Illustrierte to show us the pictures and read the stories of the various competitions. The irony of the reluctant applause by the racial purists for the record-breaking victories of Jesse Owens was not lost on us. He became an instant hero of ours - as did the boxers Max Baer and Joe Louis a short time later.

In August 1937 we spent four weeks in Buochs, a village nestled in one of the many bays of Lake Lucerne. While we were agreed that the mountains of that region in Switzerland could not compare with our beloved Dolomites, we did enjoy the swimming lessons father gave us and the boat trips on the lake. Our parents took us on a special outing by funicular rail and cable car to a pasture at the foot of the Titlis, high above the resort village of Engelberg. Father and Grete visited a boarding school at Baix-les-Bain near Lake Geneva where she was to take an entrance exam.

In Zurich father visited a bank where he held an account in trust for his mother in Palestine. They informed him that a deposit had been received from abroad, but would not tell him its source. Father was greatly disturbed by this news but true to his custom, did not tell his wife what he had heard. He feared entrapment by the Gestapo. Jews were often accused and convicted of currency law violations (Devisenschlebung). Because of these laws, the account was registered in Hanover. Mother must have noticed that something was oppressing father and was left to wonder at his worried demeanor.

We returned to Hanover. Father went to the authorities - probably the Gestapo⁶ - to report what he had learned regarding the newly arrived funds in his account. Our mother was still totally ignorant of these events. Quite likely this was true for the Gestapo also.

On October 29, 1937, just as Eva and I were getting ready to go to the birthday part of Ellen Neumann, a school friend of ours who lived in Linden, several policemen arrived in our apartment. They came to arrest father. Our parents nevertheless decided to send us to the party. We were warned not to tell anyone what had happened at home.

Mother engaged Dr. Georg Fraenkel, a well-respected Jewish lawyer. Gradually she was learning what father had so carefully withheld. I can see her to this day, bent low by a painful attack of sciatica, carrying bags full of documents to the lawyer's office in her effort to bring about father's release. Grete, Eva and I tried hard not to fight. We missed our father terribly and did not want to cause Mutti more grief. Friday nights and Saturdays his absence was almost palpable. In synagogue two other men took over for father, and at home mother said the blessings over wine and bread. Except for Frau Rothenberg, the old peddler who came weekly to us for her support, no one was allowed to sit on father's chair at the head of the kitchen table - and she only sat there because mother wouldn't tell her not to. Periodically father was allowed to write us; his first letter sounded a note of reassurance:

Hannover, 29. 10, 1937

Dear Mommy (Liebes Muttchen):

You would not believe how comfortable it is here. A small, simple but very clean room with a bed no worse than what I have at home. I have to see to it that the room is clean, but as you know a bit of housework has never been a cause of despair for me. If you and our dear little ones could be with me - of course in honorable circumstances only - I could live like this for 100 years. The guards are quite kind, they know how to teach people who lacked a proper upbringing at home how to behave. They have to have a lot

⁶ He actually wrote to the Reichsbank. We now have an almost complete dossier of documents relating to this incident, his imprisonment and the three trials at increasingly higher levels of the justice system which were needed to exonerate him. The Germans even paid all court costs.

of patience because it sometimes seems as if the inhabitants here think it is the guards whose fault it is that they have to be here...

Tell the children to be good... and not to be sad. They need not feel any kind of shame about this - their Daddy is as decent a human being as their schoolmates'... At night it is extremely quiet here so that I get ample sleep...

And at the end of November, after more than a month of imprisonment, he created a moral fable for us children about a man who traveled far and wide -- even leaving his family -- for the purpose of getting an education.

Luckily, mother finally decided to write her family in Palestine of these events. They quickly solved the puzzle of father's imprisonment. Her youngest sister and husband had separated and were preparing their divorce. In order to shelter some of his funds, the husband, Uncle Iszo, a good friend of our paternal grandmother, had unbeknownst to anyone, sent funds to her account in Zurich. This transfer had put our father into prison. Uncle Iszo promptly came to Hanover. He was put up in a small pension nearby.

Uncle Iszo, who had left Poland for Palestine in the 'twenties, held a British passport, a circumstance that enabled him to arrive in Germany poised and certain that his testimony would carry proper weight. Our parents later described to us how his pronounced semitic features and quite accented but impeccable German, one of five languages he spoke, had impressed those present in court. He testified that it was he who had deposited the money in grandmother's account. Father was saved. While this was not the end of the case, which went to three different levels of litigation and took well over a year to clear up, father was vindicated. He was not even required to pay court costs.

One evening, it was the middle of December, we heard the familiar sound of father's keys in the door. We ran into the vestibule. After seven weeks in prison, pale but steady, Vati stood before us.

For a moment we could not move. Then father embraced mother and Grete. Eva and I clung to his legs. When he had succeeded in freeing himself he went to the telephone. He asked to speak to Joseph Berliner, the President of the Jewish community. "Herskovits here," he said with his usual emphasis on the first syllable as we watched him savor Herr Berliner's expressions of delight at the other end. Father and Joseph Berliner had maintained an excellent relationship over the years, and we regarded the old gentleman, his somewhat handicapped daughter Clara who was his only surviving descendant, and her companion, Fräulein Wild, as special friends of the family. We went on our annual Channukah visit to the Berliners in their white villa in Brühlstrasse, a visit that was to be our last. Immensely relieved to have father home we celebrated Chanukah.

Because of what we read in the daily papers and the worries we often saw on the faces of our parents, we began to ask father if we should not also try to leave Germany. Grete warned him that he would be the one "to lock the gate in Hamburg" after the other Jews had all left. I visualized a huge wrought iron gate, and the last boat leaving the harbor. I could not see if we were on it....But father seems to have listened to her warning for a month after he returned from prison, having decided to postpone sending her to school in Switzerland, he made his first inquiries to send Grete to England.

Father wrote to his half-brother in New York. Uncle Akos promised to send us the necessary affidavits. When these arrived they were an invitation to visit the World's Fair in 1939. The intent of these papers was our permanent immigration, but father

explained that because he was born in a part of Hungary that now belonged to Romania, he could not get a permanent visa for the United States. The quota for Romania had been exhausted years earlier - probably shortly after the First World War. He could only qualify for a visitor's visa. His brother was aware of these complications. He advised father to go to Canada after our visit in New York. We could then reenter America from there. Father knew that this was, at best, a semi-legal maneuver, (probably practiced to this day) and he would not hear of it. It was another instance of his integrity and unquestioning respect for the law - no matter whose.

The Nazi Noose Tightens

Nineteen thirty-eight was to be the last full year our family had together. Since father's release from prison late in 1937 we children clung to him as never before. While he had safely returned to us, a steady stream of new anti-Jewish measures allowed for little letup in our anxiety. Often father was detained by his work. When that happened, we felt his absence acutely and feared for his safety. Yet, despite the many ominous political signs, our parents made a valiant effort to continue the pattern of our daily life.

We were looking forward to our tenth birthday on the eighth of March. Mother promised that, this year, the little cakes we would serve our friends would be store-bought rather than baked by her at home. None of the other mothers we knew baked their own fancy tortes, and, while sighing at our foolishness, mother understood how much we wanted to be "like our friends". There also was a cold supper, and Grete organized games and competitions and played the piano for a riotous game of musical chairs. And we were happy with our many gifts and enjoyed the attention lavished on us.

A week after our birthday celebration Hitler marched into Austria. The picture on the front page of the Hannoversche Tageblatt told the story better than words: the streets of Vienna were lined with jubilant Austrians who waved their flags and welcomed their Führer "home." The word "Anschluss" was on everyone's lips. Hitler continued his defiance of the international community. The Anschluss was a blow to our parents and those like them because they had expected that England and France would not stand idly by while Hitler enlarged his territory and his reach. But they did not abandon hope. They still thought the time would come when, by moral and economic pressure, the outside world would have to apply brakes to Hitler's aggressions and, as a result, the situation for the Jews in Germany would ease also.

A week or so before Purim father took out his Megillah (the scroll which records the story of Esther) and practiced reading. We listened delightedly when, toward the end, clearly, in one breath, he pronounced the names of the ten sons of Haman - the villain of the tale. They all met their deserved end on the gallows. Surely, I thought, that story is proof that justice will prevail.

During the following weeks our synagogue choir rehearsed the melodies we would sing on Passover, the next holiday of the Jewish calendar. Our teachers explained to us that Passover, aside from commemorating the exodus from Egypt, also celebrates the start of spring, a time of renewal and hope. Father practiced one of his favorite prayers, "Tal," a plea for dew -- the moisture necessary for the growth of crops in the ancient Jewish land. At home, as usual for several weeks before Passover, everything was topsy turvy. Our excitement at this upheaval was unaffected by mother's worry that she might not be able to complete the myriad of tasks for a proper Passover.

Packages of large, round matzos arrived and were stored near the door in the dining room. I could not wait. Hours before the seder, even though it was strictly off limits, I slipped into the dining room. I made a small tear in one of the packages and broke off a tiny piece of matzo. A year had gone by, it tasted just like I remembered it, but also different, crisp and new. Then I began to worry that my parents would discover the small opening I had made in that package - or that punishment would come from on high. My parents failed to notice - but for a long time I was less sure about the deity.

Finally by nightfall all was sparkling, and the unfamiliar Passover porcelain was in place. For the Seder mother and Grete spread a snow white damask cloth over the

dining room table. At father's place the Seder plate held the herbs and foods which served as reminders of our deliverance from oppression long ago. Eva and I needed no urging to wash and change into our new summer dresses. Mother had made us dresses of the raw silk that she had bought in Lucerne the previous summer, and she had embroidered small red and blue dots all around the neckline and sleeves. We were allowed to stay up late. And now my being the youngest - by fifty-five minutes - was an advantage. At the first Seder I was called on to ask the "Ma Nishtanoh" (The Four Questions. Much of the readings in the Haggadah revolve around answering those four questions.) Eva got her turn at the second Seder.

We spent our summer vacation in Geisa, a village near the University town of Tübingen. We followed our usual vacation customs and took long walks in the surrounding woods. The only Jewish residents were the Goldschmidts, an elderly woman blinded by diabetes, the widow of a scholar who had taught at the University, and her daughter. They lived in an old house filled with trophies and memorabilia. All the clocks in their house had stopped. To their delight, father volunteered to fix them. (His stepfather, a watchmaker, must have taught him the rudiments of his skill, when his mother and stepfather lived with father and then with our parents more than a decade earlier.) Towering over us on a ladder, father spent hours until he had got most of those clocks running again.

Sometime during the summer of 1938 the Nazis ordered all Jewish men and women whose given name was considered "insufficiently Jewish" to add the names "Sara" and "Israel". Even before Hitler's accession to power, Hans Globke, a Prussian government official, had recommended that Jews be forbidden name changes to prevent them from hiding their Jewish ancestry.¹ Mother and the three of us had to add the name "Sara" while father's first name, Samuel, was considered Jewish enough.. If our parents considered this order ridiculous, they muted their feelings lest they encourage us to make disparaging remarks about it outside our home. Inevitably, we made up for the lack of freedom of expression in this and other respects by rambunctious and outspoken behavior at home. While we would not openly oppose our parents, Eva and I often criticized each other's behavior quite mercilessly. It was our only real outlet, but it irritated and exhausted our mother.

Preparations for the High Holy Days started in earnest when we returned from vacation. Members of the congregation came to father's office and purchased seats in the synagogue. Every seat holder received a color-coded ticket for himself and his family. Latecomers had to be content with seats in the old synagogue across the street, where services were held for the overflow. For many years, on Yom Kippur, a Christian woman and her two daughters had come to our house to supervise the children of the congregation who were too young to attend synagogue services. Two adjoining school rooms were turned into a large play area, and toys locked away all year were brought out of storage to entertain the children. The congregation provided lunch, and cots for the smaller children's afternoon rest. But now father told us that the law forbade Frau and her daughters to come to our house. A young woman from the congregation would take over. Eva and I spent the morning participating in the choir. Around lunch time Grete took us home. Our house was full of children, but I missed the two tall girls with their long blond braids who had played so patiently with us. I was glad when father and mother finally returned. As in previous years father assured us that the long service and fast had not tired him at all. He had "enough energy to start all over again." Not so John

¹ Cf., Hilberg, Raul, *The Destruction of the European Jews*, vol. I, p. 33. The directive was for internal use only, dated December 23, 1932. This is the same Hans Globke who was to serve in Konrad Adenauer's post-war government.

Mandelbrod, Grete's piano teacher who was conductor of the synagogue choir. When he came for her weekly lesson, bounding up the stairs two at a time, we heard him sing joyfully: "Yom Kippur ist vorbei, Yom Kippur ist vorbei!" (Yom Kippur is over.) (Eight or so years later, while recovering in a Swedish Sanatorium, I heard that tune again. I asked Grete about it and she wrote me that it was a theme of Beethoven's tenth piano sonata.)

No sooner had these solemn Holy Days ended when it was time for Succoth and Simchat Torah. Those two holidays I liked best of all. The succah of the Jewish community, a wooden prefabricated structure, was erected in the school yard. It was painted a light blue-gray, bordered with colorful garlands of fruit. Large enough to have a coal-burning stove, its three tables were arranged in a horse-shoe shape. The succah could seat thirty or more adults. We helped father decorate the walls with multi-colored paper chains, paper lanterns and pictures of Rachel's tomb and other biblical scenes which were stored in a special box for this annual use. A truck load of evergreens and pine tree branches was delivered to the back yard and perfumed the air with a pungent smell. Until father found time to put the pine branches on the slatted roof of the succah, Eva and I had fun pushing each other on top of that prickly green. After synagogue services, the members came to make, or to hear, the kiddush ((blessing of the holiday, with a beaker of wine). In small colored glasses, brandy or liqueur and crescent-shaped, chocolate-covered Balsen cookies were served by mother and Grete. Dr. Freund, the Landrabbiner (district rabbi) among many others, took his dinners in the succah. His wife brought him his food in an enameled, triple-decker food carrier, and their small white Spitz accompanied her. His piercing bark terrified Eva and me; but mother, always concerned about good nutrition, looked at their soup and said worriedly to us that it seemed to be too fatty.

For Simchat Torah a group of women of our congregation prepared bags of sweets, homebaked cakes and small toys for every child of the congregation. In one of the school rooms in our house, volunteers were busy packing the bags in assembly-line fashion, and we were allowed to help. The promise of these special gifts of sweets drew even the children of families to the service who did not usually attend it. The synagogue was beautifully decorated. All perachot (curtains that cover the doors to the ark) were draped over the railings of the three women's galleries. Brocades of purple, yellow, reds and blues, on which Hebrew sayings and dedications were embroidered with gold and silver threads, lit up the usually somber sanctuary. Carefully and with great reverence all Torah scrolls were lifted out of the ark during the service. Singing the traditional liturgy, and walking in procession, father, the two rabbis and members of the congregation carried the Torah scrolls around the sanctuary.

The celebration of these festivals brightened our lives. I loved them for the peace and beauty they imparted to our surroundings. At home the atmosphere was transformed. This miracle recurred every Sabbath: not only our parents, but every ordinary object took on a glow that changed its every-day appearance. On holidays I experienced these transformations even more intensely.

I was just beginning to understand that being Jewish brought both pain and joy, when, abruptly, violently, the cycle ended for me for all time. In an instant, our Jewishness, until now "merely" a problem, became a calamity for us.

It began on October 27th, one year after father's arrest, when we heard that all Jews with Polish citizenship were being forced to return to Poland. It was the first time

we heard the expression, "Abschiebung" (deportation).² These Polish Jews, around 18,000 nation wide, were forcibly put on trains to the Polish border. My memory contains one small detail: Father asked our mother to prepare sandwiches, but to use only cottage cheese. I asked her why she had to make so many sandwiches and why father would not allow her to use regular cheese. Mother would only say that the very orthodox Polish Jews did not eat hard cheeses, because these could have been made with rennet, a by-product of a cow's stomach. At that time no kosher equivalent was obtainable. Father must have taken those sandwiches to the Rusthaus, located not far from us, where Hannover's Polish Jews had been forced to assemble.

Just three weeks later, very early on the morning of the tenth of November, father received a telephone call. Wishing not to disturb mother and us children, father did not tell us of this call until much later. We were getting ready for school when we heard a tremendous, thunder-like noise. "What happened? What was that?" we asked father. His response that two trolleys might have collided a block away on Goethestrasse made sense to us. Hardly had our class assembled when our teachers dismissed us "for the day." Upstairs we were surprised to find our parents intently discussing something. Vati ought to have been in his office. Our parents told us that it would be best if we all went to spend a few days with friends, the Family Hahn. Father explained that these Jewish friends were Czech nationals. Their house should thus be off-limits to the Gestapo, a circumstance father thought the "legalistic" Gestapo would take into account. Father did not explain why this circumstance was of importance to us. But his assumption proved correct.

The apartment of Family Hahn - we had often met them at the Kaunitz Schrebergarten - was crowded with people. I went to the kitchen to say "hello" to the blind grandmother with whom I used to walk in the garden of our friends. She had aged, and in the confusion I could not be sure that she knew who was speaking to her. A year later the Hahns' Czech passport had become totally useless. They were caught in the same net as almost all European Jews. Only four years later, on the second transport to leave Hanover, they were shipped to the "East" to perish either in the Warsaw Ghetto or in Treblinka.

From the conversations of the adults around us we children learned what father seems to have known earlier: many Jewish men had been "taken away." A great many Jewish stores and apartments had been ransacked and looted. After several days of camping out at our friends' apartment, our parents decided to take us home. But despite of what we had heard about the upheaval and destruction that had befallen the Jewish community, we could not imagine what we would find in our house.

As we walked up the three flights we had to carefully pick our way on the stone steps to avoid stepping on glass and pieces of wood. And chaos confronted us when we opened our front door. In the spacious vestibule, three of the four doors to the two large yellowish oak linen closets were open. The closets had been emptied. Behind the still closed fourth door, a few apparently forgotten, older pieces of bed linens remained. Broken dishes and glass were strewn everywhere, and silver utensils and candle sticks

² At the time we children did not know how these members of our community who had Polish citizenship were being collected or where they were being kept. But I know now that these families were forcibly driven into a building near the synagogue, called the Rusthaus. The house was named for the already mentioned Bernhard Rust, a Hanoveranian who served as Hitler's Minister of Education (Reichsminister für Wissenschaft, Erziehung und Volksbildung.)

were missing from their customary place in the dining room cabinet. The furniture of the study - the room directly opposite the front door - had been methodically hacked to pieces. Hebrew books, their pages torn, were everywhere on the floor. Many of these were sidurim (Hebrew prayer books for the Sabbath and the different holidays) and father began to pick them up as he was stumbling over them. In the vestibule, the cabin trunk that had held linens bought for Grete's planned emigration, was empty. Dumbfounded, afraid to move, mother and the three of us just stood there.

Father tried to comfort us: "We should thank God that we are together and that we are unharmed. Luckily we decided to leave home and were not here when these people came." But while we continued to look at our ruined home, father had other, much more terrible news: our synagogue had been totally destroyed. That was the message of the telephone call he had received days ago: someone wanted him to know that our synagogue was about to be dynamited. From now on services would have to be held in the old Shul across the street from the synagogue. This much older building, built in 1827, had been used for the "overflow" of the High Holy Days, and for our Saturday afternoon youth services. During the week it became a gym for us students and an auditorium for the community's cultural activities. The congregation would no longer need our choir. Father bent down and picked up the leg of what had been a black stained chair in the study. While he looked at what remained of its carved top, splintered beyond repair, he said: "Remember what I have so often told you. Mere material losses are unimportant in the total scheme of things"...

Because father was hidden with us at the Hahns, he escaped arrest. Many other men of our congregation were incarcerated in Buchenwald. For the first time we children heard talk about prisons in our country -- concentration camps -- that were far worse than the place where father had been imprisoned a year earlier. The men returned, but while they were warned not to speak of their experiences, some of the stories of how they were tortured made the rounds. Under orders of the Gestapo they had to leave the country as soon as possible. Those who already had the necessary papers packed a few belongings, took the ten marks they were allotted and, with, or without their families, fled the country they had not too long ago called their own. If father had been imprisoned, he too would have had to find a way to emigrate -- and our lives might have turned out differently.

A few days after our return home from the Hahns, the Gestapo arrived in father's office. They took father to the nearby ruins of the synagogue in the Bergstrasse. He was to help them search for the safe in which the old ritual silver ornaments had been stored. Wading knee-deep in the rubble of what used to be his beloved synagogue, father looked where his small dressing room had been. The safe and its precious contents had disappeared without a trace. The whole search was a charade, played for the benefit of some insurance company. Father returned home, covered in ashes and dust. Without changing his clothes, he sat exhausted and silent at the kitchen table. That is where we found him when we came upstairs after school. He seemed far away and did not hear our questions.

Our synagogue had stood in the center of a large open square, the first free-standing structure of its kind in Germany. This placement allowed a full appreciation of its architectural detail and impressive size. Its reddish yellow, glazed brick exterior, a material native to that region of Germany and often used for local buildings, spoke of the desire of Hanover's Jews to be members of their surrounding society.³ We had taken its

³ Krinsky, Carol Herselle. Synagogues of Europe. Architecture, History, Meaning. Cambridge, 1985.

presence in our life for granted. It was there and always would be - our synagogue was simply an integral part of our being. Now, when we went to the old Shul for Friday night and Sabbath services and could not avoid passing the ruins, it was impossible to believe that the rubble we saw had once been our beautiful synagogue. What was left of it looked like a monstrous skeleton. Above the entrance the huge rose window was a gaping round hole. The central dome was gone, dynamite had collapsed it into the interior of what had been the sanctuary. Flanking the entrance, the two turrets whose stairs we had so often climbed, hovered eerily in mid-air.

Soon after those weeks, two oil paintings were brought to our dining room. One was a large self-portrait of Ernst Oppler, a son of Edwin, Hanover's famous Jewish architect of both our synagogue and the Lützowstrasse Gemeindehaus where Eva and I had been born and where we were living. The intensity of his gaze, which only increased as we moved away from it, deeply impressed us. Only weeks earlier the Nazis had destroyed his father's greatest achievement. The grave eyes of the son seemed to speak of both rebuke and sorrow... I think that the second picture was a painting by Moritz Oppenheim. It depicted a Jewish family scene. I do not know who the owner of these pictures was, why they were stored in our dining room or what became of them.

Gradually by reading the newspaper and piecing together the comments of our parents, we learned that Herschel Grynszpan, the young Jew who had shot Vom Rath came from Hanover. He had gone to live in Paris a few years before. Grynszpan was said to have become distraught when he received a postcard from his father telling him of the unbearable conditions faced by his family after their deportation from Hanover. They were among the eighteen thousand Polish Jews who were trying to subsist on the Polish side of the border with Germany. Crammed into barns and horse stables because Poland did not want to let them in, some decided to try to return to Germany. If they were caught crossing the border, they were immediately shot.⁴ In Paris, Herschel Grynszpan, beside himself at this news, went to the German embassy, intending to kill the ambassador. He shot the first German official he met, Ernst vom Rath.

The significance of this type of action by the Germans in which a sizable group of men, women and children of Polish Jewish origin were seized and expelled from the country where some of them had lived since the turn of the century - thirty or more years - has not been sufficiently investigated. It was no less than a harbinger of the persecutions to come. I do not know how it was assessed at the time. It was perpetrated upon a minority within a minority. Moreover, this group of Jews was far from popular in German Jewish circles. As for the shooting of vom Rath, could it not be seen as an instance of that rare Jewish resistance or, more likely, revenge - with its predictable consequence of terrible vengeance?

Abroad Jewish organizations began to make some effort to accelerate the emigration of those recently incarcerated. Of course I do not know where our father would have gone. But late in 1938 our parents spoke about a possible rabbinical appointment in St. Gallen, Switzerland. Nothing came of it, perhaps because mother was then making plans to enter the hospital for a long delayed, though minor, operation.

After the destruction of our synagogue, our life was no longer the same. While in December 1938 the Jewish community - and our family - attempted to regroup and school was resumed in our house, our parents began to think of the possibility of sending

⁴ Somewhat later a few of these Polish Jews did, temporarily, return. This happened if they needed to dissolve their businesses, or liquidate debts, i.e., if their presence in Hannover benefited some non-Jewish person.

Eva and me abroad. Plans to send Grete to England were well underway. Some foreign countries willingly accepted small groups of Jewish children, but they would not do the same for their parents.

One evening at supper Vati broached the subject. Vati and Mutti had decided to send Eva and me on a children's transport to Holland. "Holland is nearer Germany than England and besides the climate is better." The bread on my plate took a long time to get down after Vati finished talking. Eva jumped up from her chair. She pleaded with our parents not to be "sent away." It was the first time of many when she acted as my mouthpiece. Vati told us "not to be foolish." ("Seit doch keine Narren!") Life would be so much better for us in Holland. "You will be able to go to school undisturbed, and, with God's help, before long we will all be together again."

There was little joy that final Chanukah together as I listened to our parents enumerate the benefits of our stay in Holland. "You will have so much better nutrition; the political atmosphere will be calmer; you will not be taunted by other children." Mother was busy sewing clothes for our impending departure. Eva promptly refused to try them on. She did not want to cooperate in our separation. We had never been away from our parents, had never slept in a friend's house. My one independent foray into the outside world had been instituted only recently. On Thursdays when mother prepared fish for our midday meal, she sent me on an errand to a little shop several streets away. I had to cross a busy intersection on Goethestrasse near the Clevertor. Clutching a small white porcelain pot in one hand and some coins in the other, I was to ask for ten pfennig's worth of freshly prepared mustard. Now we were to be sent to Holland, a paradise of milk and butter, and peace and quiet. Who would take care of us, or what would await us there was impossible to imagine.

On January 3, 1939, our parents took Grete, Eva and me to the photographer on Goethestrasse to document our final day together. The next day we assembled with the other children at the railroad station. We joined a transport from Berlin. This was nothing like the vacation trips we used to take with our parents. The railroad station had lost its air of pleasurable anticipation. It was merely grimy and deserted that morning. Eva's protests had been to no avail. She and I were setting out alone.

Kindertransport to Holland

In the train Eva complains that I am making her nervous. "Rutchen, sit down. You cannot see them anymore." She is right. The last few houses on the outskirts of Hanover have long since vanished. The train is speeding through a flat, monotonous landscape. I stand there, holding on to the leather strap of the window, my face pressed against the cold glass. I cannot tear myself away from the window where, moments before, I saw father and Grete, their arms around our crying mother. Mutti had to struggle to remain upright. "I know," I say to Eva. I sit down and land on top of my carefully wrapped, favorite doll. The package is crushed, the doll's sweet porcelain face is a mess and her white wooden crib is a jumble of sticks. In an instant I have destroyed my favorite possession... If only Eva had not told me to sit down, if only I had been more careful, if only I were still home...

Together with several hundred other German-Jewish children from Berlin and other towns, the train is taking us to neighboring Holland. It is the first time in our life that we have been separated from our parents. Although they promised us that this will be a temporary parting, I cannot imagine when or where we will see them again. Holland agreed to shelter us children from the ever more relentless persecutions by the Nazis. Two months ago our synagogue was destroyed during Kristallnacht, and we have not recovered from the dread of that experience. And now we had to part from our parents.

I can still their faces, especially Mutti's. Her tears are streaming down her face, but she makes no effort to stem them or wipe them away.

Eva sits next to me. She is busy with a navy blue leather satchel Vati has bought each of us just a few days ago. Like me, she tries hard not to cry. The four other girls in our compartment have come from a Jewish orphanage in Berlin. For a moment, I wonder what it must be like to be them.

Eva and I used to love traveling on trains. But this trip is utterly different from the vacations on which we went with our parents, and the drab wintry landscape that rushes past the window of our compartment does not interest me.

It was night by the time we arrived in Amsterdam. We were greeted by members of a refugee committee. Perhaps they did not expect us that night. There were no beds for us. We spent the first night away from home on a concrete floor covered with some blankets but without mattresses. Holland, it occurred to me, was not quite the paradise our parents had described.

The next day we were quarantined in Amsterdam-Zuid in barracks furnished with bunk beds. The food arrived in huge metal containers and tasted somewhat metallic. We lined up to get a scoop of thick, light yellow "chicken soup". It was almost inedible, and we were not yet hungry enough to have lost our fussiness. Outside it was chilly and wet and the barracks were inadequately heated. It felt as if we were exposed to the elements. I thought of home, our cosy kitchen and warm Kinderzimmer. Before then I had had no

idea that central heating could be something special and that many people lived without it.

Within days the first letter from our parents arrived. They sent us the photograph of our family taken the last day we were together. Eva's unhappiness, much more vocal than mine, was somewhat assuaged when she held the picture in her hands. It hurt me to see the grave expression in the eyes of Vati and Grete. Our mother looked even more sad and resigned into the camera. Eva insisted that the picture be kept under her pillow, and she was relieved when I agreed to her demand. All I had to do to remember their faces was to close my eyes. Every night before I went to sleep I saw them as clearly as if they were standing before me.

On January 10 we moved to Wijk aan Zee, a North Sea resort village, northwest of Amsterdam, where a Catholic organization maintained a children's convalescent home. Friendly nurses welcomed us. In Dutch, one of them tried to explain to us that we should undress to be washed by them. Repeatedly she pointed to large cakes of green soap (*Kernseife*), but we looked at her uncomprehendingly. Then, all of a sudden, I heard the similarity between her words and my German ones. Pleased with my discovery, I translated for the other children what the nurse was trying to tell us. She never forgot my help, and I became her "favorite" - something of an advantage in that very strict setting. She looked the other way when I took a book with me at nap time - or ate my ration of peanuts in bed. And in a small snapshot of our group, I sit next to her, with her arm protectively around my shoulders.

The German-Jewish refugee children who had turned up in their home were very different from the children of the slums who were the usual wards of these Catholic nurses. With partial success we persuaded them that the older ones among us - we ranged in age from two years to eighteen - could wash themselves and had no need of regular afternoon naps. They agreed to let us wash ourselves, but we had to take our daily nap.

The food was much better than in Amsterdam-Zuid although meat was always ground up after it had been cooked. We took our meals in a large dining room at long, marble-topped tables. The milk, served in zinc beakers, tasted of the soap suds used to wash them. It was hard to get down, but we weren't allowed to leave it. The only way out was spilling it. At meal time one could hear a musical "ping" as beakers hit the marble top -- on bad days this swelled to a whole cacophany.

Daily, in rows of two, we were taken for walks on the wind-swept deserted beaches. The ocean and beach looked quite different from what I remembered of our summer vacations on the island of Norderney. High threatening greenish black waves flooded the sand and sprayed us if we were slow to jump out of the way. Still, at times I enjoyed our walks and the starkness of those dunes with their spare tall grasses.

In February a young Jewish teacher arrived and taught us Dutch and Dutch geography. Somewhat handicapped by a slight limp, she was kind and patient with us. For Purim the older girls created a skit, singing, "Dreaming of the South Sea and the Home in Wijk aan Zee", and generally making fun the home and its many rules.

Letters from our parents arrived with utmost regularity. We asked for and received a second family picture - the first one had been ruined by "excessive use." On our eleventh birthday in early March, a small parcel with chocolates arrived. The director of the home, an imposing elderly woman in a dark-red robe-like dress, called us into her office. Our parents were on the telephone! I could not really understand what mother

said to me because she was crying while she tried to speak. Then it was Eva's turn, and father talked with her. In a few moments it was all over.

During the second half of March mail no longer arrived so punctually. We were worried. We only had to look at each other to burst into tears. Finally we decided to ask the director to let us call home. Despite our pleas, she refused. Deeply troubled, we participated in the home's unchanging routine. All tasks were performed together. Together we went to the bathrooms, washed, slept in the large dormitories, walked and ate. Crying, Eva and I, holding hands or in close embrace, went along. There was no privacy, and the other children must have thought we were crybabies.

Finally at the end of March a letter arrived. Father wrote us that mother had been hospitalized. She had undergone minor corrective surgery for a gynecological disorder and was recuperating. We had known not only that she was in need of such surgery, but also that the problem was a consequence of our birth. Thus the news did not really surprise us. Father enclosed a short note from Mutti which puzzled us because it referred to our birthday as if she did not know that we had talked on the telephone and received the chocolates she had sent us:

Dearest Little Ones: Now another year has passed and your birthday is here. [I wish you] good health and happiness until you are 120 years old! [A traditional wish] May gracious God permit our speedy reunion! But until such time we do not want to complain and argue with out fate. Rather we want to pray for good health, joy and contentment. I hope that the sweets from me will arrive in good time since I will be unable to call you - perhaps Papa will be able to reach you. Please accept my warmest wishes even if they can only be conveyed by letter.

I hug and kiss you - unfortunately only in my thoughts.
Your ever loving - Mother

Early in April our refugee group left Wijk aan Zee for the very old Burgerweeshuis (orphanage) located on Kalverstraat in the heart of Amsterdam.

The Dutch orphans in the Burgerweeshuis were living in a separate wing. We could see them exercise or play games in the inner courtyard of the building. Their dresses had sleeves of different color, one red and one black, and the bodice was gray or striped. This clown-like uniform was meant to deter their escape or assure their swift return should they managed to run away.

Our life, unrestricted compared to what we saw of theirs, was beginning to take shape. The same central refugee kitchen as during our first brief stay in Amsterdam fed us. The food had not improved, although there was a weekly treat of a small piece of pastry and a bag of peanuts - intended for the monkeys on our regular visits to the zoo. Quantities of white rice with a sprinkling of brown sugar were part of the daily fare. On Sundays dried apricots replaced the sugar. It was then I remembered our mother's dire warnings - when she was exasperated with our poor eating - that the time might come when we would be glad to have the spinach or carrots she was begging us to eat.

The woman in charge of the home began regular hair inspections to see if we had acquired lice. Evidently despite Holland's vaunted cleanliness head lice were a common occurrence among children. One by one we had to submit our heads to the woman's close scrutiny. If, during this procedure, she paused for only a second as she pulled the

comb through my hair, I would wonder in dread if she had found a louse. The whole procedure deeply offended me, and I hated to submit to it.

For the first time in my life I hated to get up in the morning. I would wake with a start, and immediately my worries threatened to overwhelm me, especially my gnawing worry about Mutti. It made the cold unfriendly dormitory and the damp washroom that awaited us even less inviting. At home father had insisted that we wash with cold water in the mornings to "toughen" us (abhärten), but it had evidently not been successful.

We had been worrying about mother for about a month; it seemed like an age. Two more short notes from her were included in father's letters to us: One stressed that she was in a great hurry, but "Papa and Grete will write you everything. Just stay healthy - that is the main thing. In my thoughts I kiss you a thousand times. Mother"

At the end of April father had exciting news: Grete would stop off in Amsterdam on her way to England. We were so happy at the prospect of seeing her -- it was now four long months since we had left Hanover -- we could hardly wait for her to arrive. One of my new-found friends in the home cautioned me: "If I were you, I would not be all that happy..." It shocked me to hear her hint at what we ourselves feared: Grete would bring us bad news from home.

Meanwhile we had been enrolled in a home economics course in a vocational school. We were to learn to iron, sew on a hand-cranked sewing machine and do a little cooking. One day as we were leaving the school building, we saw Grete. She was at the opposite end of the street, walking swiftly toward us. Grete had just turned seventeen. She was a tall girl and looked serious and adult in her traveling clothes. We hugged her and clung to her and did not want to let go.

Mrs. Wijsmuller, one of the senior officials of the Refugee Committee who with her husband's occasional assistance supervised our group home, had arranged to give us a few hours of complete privacy for our reunion with Grete. We went to her home, located in a beautiful old house on Nassaugracht, a street bordering on a canal. A housekeeper showed us into a dark, highly polished dining room. Lunch, set on a table by the window overlooking the water, consisted of white bread with chocolate spread, a favorite treat in Holland. As soon as we were alone, we began to question Grete about our mother. Haltingly, she told us what had actually happened at home in Hanover. Mutti had died. On our birthday, right after she spoke to us on the telephone, she entered the hospital, for what was considered a minor surgical procedure. A week later, on March sixteenth, she suddenly died, probably of pneumonia. The notes father sent us from her were written in preparation for her stay in the hospital. By the time father finally told us that she had undergone an operation, she was no longer alive.

I looked at the table that had been set so elegantly for us, and out the window at the sunny canal on which sightseeing boats were passing, and thought: so that is what it is like to be an orphan. I, always called the crybaby of the family, did not cry when I heard that I had lost my mother. Eva too was totally silent. We were too stunned when Grete confirmed our worst fears. As usual, father had tried to protect us as long as possible. He sent Grete to tell us the terrible news that he had been keeping from us. I could not help remembering that father, whose tact in these matters was well known in our congregation in Hannover, had often been asked to break sudden bad news to the wife or husband of a member. When Dr. Lesser Knoller, the Director of the Jewish Teachers Seminary, and a friend of our parents, was fatally injured while crossing a busy street, it was father who had to tell his widow. Grete stayed with us for several more days, but I do not recall a single thing about the remainder of her visit in Amsterdam.

Grete arrived in Middlesbrough at the beginning of May. She had a work permit from a Jewish family to teach the piano to their small daughter. No sooner had she arrived when the family dismissed their household help. They decided that Grete might as well perform the domestic chores also. Grete was very disturbed by these developments and wrote us repeatedly complaining about her plight. Like other girls in her circumstances, she had the choice of working either as a domestic or in a factory. The only other possibility was to learn nursing. Within a short time she had got in touch with Nathan Laski - father of the more famous Harold - who was president of the Victoria Memorial Hospital ("the Jewish" as they called it) in Manchester. Mr. Laski made it possible for her to begin work immediately as an aide in the hospital. Her formal course of nursing studies could not begin until she was eighteen years old in April 1940. The Laski family was both kind and attentive so that when she wrote to father about them, he was briefly tempted to hope that they might prove helpful in his emigration as well.

In Amsterdam Eva and I learned that father had written to the woman who ran our home to ask that she keep an eye on us. She must have told some of the older girls of the death of our mother - which resulted in the cryptic, even spiteful remark the girl made to us. The aides in the home were quite kind, but I do not think that they treated us different from the other children. There were two very small boys, barely two years old, and I was assigned to prepare and give them their supper. Almost nightly this consisted of "pap", bread cubes that had been soaked in warm milk. They seemed to like it. I also volunteered to sweep the girls' half of the large dining hall. As a reward, I was allowed to stay up half an hour longer. An aide of the home, a very dark-haired, plain young Dutch Jewish woman befriended me. She taught me to fix the runs in her silk stockings, using a special crochet hook. It required good eye sight and a lot of patience. I set to work and when I had completed three pairs, she took me to a fancy department store for a treat of ice cream.

When one boy died and several children fell gravely ill with diphtheria, our home economics course was stopped. We wondered who would catch the disease next, but most of all we all feared the discomfort and pain when the doctor lined us up to take weekly throat cultures from us.

Now we had time on our hands. Eva and I fairly threw ourselves into the activities that were arranged to amuse us refugee children. Teachers came to the home to teach us Dutch. We were even taken to a horse race. Before the diagnosis of diphtheria was made, we weekly went swimming in Amsterdam's huge public indoor pool. I wrote father: "Is it all right if I jump from the three meter board?" By the time his negative response arrived, I had jumped. In most things Eva had far more courage than I, but because she was rather nearsighted, she did not want to jump from that height. But then she consented to at least go up with me. She ventured to the edge of the board, and I gave her a light tap. Down she went. When she reemerged wet and spluttering, she was furious. There were other ways in which I exasperated her. I did not like letter-writing nearly as much as she and she would stand over me, commanding: "write!" Grete preserved our letters, and while Eva's handwriting looks firm and determined to me, my additions to her letters show a more tentative, hesitant handwriting. Occasionally I expressed sadness at the loss of our mother. I complained to Grete that there was no one I could talk to and that I could not cry. Eva also mentioned mother on her birthday on May 19th, and she spoke of her sadness when the other children celebrated Mother's Day.

The Refugee Committee was led by a family Kramarsky. A well-to-do banker, he had emigrated from Germany with his wife and children. Mrs. Kramarsky, accompanied by her daughter Sonia, regularly came to inspect the home. Sonia, not yet twenty, was an

ardent Zionist. A good-looking, sturdy girl, she wore her long dark braids coiled around her head. The Kramarskys knew that we had lost our mother. When Mrs. Kramarsky wanted to know how Grete was doing in England, I told her of her unhappiness. Mrs. Kramarsky reacted rather sharply: "Tell her not to complain too much, she could be sent back to Germany!" Her daughter took a genuine interest in our activities and helped to organize some of our performances and festivities.

The news from Hanover was startling: our father planned to remarry. His future wife, Mary (Mania) Münzer, had been widowed in early February. Her only child, Lotte, was a little more than two years older than we. We had not met Lotte although we thought that we might have seen her once or twice, perhaps in school. Some time in July we heard that their marriage had taken place on June 16. It was the last official act of our Landrabbiner, Dr. Freund, who, father wrote, was by now very frail. He died a couple of weeks later. Grete must have asked father about Lotte, for sometime in July he wrote her: "First of all I want to answer your question regarding my wife's child. She is almost fourteen, and was born on the 11th of December 1925 in Hanover. She is a German citizen. She is called Charlotte Sara. She is a good student and has good natural ability. She is very well developed for her age and is consequently quite sturdy. I think you saw her before you left so you know that she is also very pretty."

Father, we later learned, had other, urgent concerns. He had a permit to go to England, his new wife did not. Many members of the Jewish community were leaving Germany, and others anxiously tried to get the necessary papers to get out. Mania, as she asked us to call her, was terrified that father might leave without her, as happened in some families.

Years later I surmised that father's early remarriage after our mother's death was a response to the uncertainties of the summer of 1939. It was one way to reassure his wife to be that he would do everything in his power to get emigration papers for her as well. At the time of his remarriage, we were incapable of understanding his situation. Eva and I, and this must have been true for Grete also, felt shocked and hurt by what seemed his undue haste.

Meanwhile, father repeatedly prodded Grete to attempt by various routes to get a permit for his wife. He stressed both his and her ability to perform any kind of work.

August 6, 1939

Dearest Gretelchen:

[...] Enclosed are four photos [of my wife] and a health certificate. If you need them I can send you excellent references. From my own knowledge I can attest to the fact that there is no more decent Jewish woman in Hanover than she.

Since I do not have a work permit for abroad [England is meant] I can work with my wife. You can assure people that in all of England they would find no more suitable housekeepers than us.

You can also tell them that I could entertain a whole audience with song recitals. I really do not have to tell you what you can or should say without exaggeration. [...] Warmest kisses, your loving Vater.

Already in July he had written: "I have not yet given up hope that one day we will be together again with you, Eva and Ruth. How we will achieve it I cannot, at the

moment, say. It could be that you children will succeed in carrying it off." In another letter, he again assures Grete that he would be willing to do any kind of work, manual or not. "We are both very skilled, and more than willing to do what is necessary. We would be an asset to any staff...."

We found out that he also wrote to Hanoveranians in Amsterdam, who, he knew, had relatives in England to help Eva and me get to England. But he warned Grete not to raise our hopes. When he learned that our school friend, Ellen Neumann, had to attend Catholic church services in Scotland, he worried about such possibilities for us. And while he reported on his activities in the office and wrote Grete about singing techniques and singers, his letters sound full of intense longing to be reunited with us.

More than fifty years later his pleas are as heartrending as if they had just been uttered. Eva and I also spoke with each other of our hope that Margaret would help father and Mania to get to England. And Eva wrote Margaret in her new, forceful, style:

Amsterdam, 8.8.39. Liebe Greti!

You will be surprised to have mail from us so soon again, but the reason for it is extremely important. Since more and more people are emigrating, it is very necessary that Papa also emigrates. I ask you therefore to get in touch with Mr. Laski and the Woburn House [site of the Refugee Committee in London] so as to leave no stone unturned to enable Papa and Frau M. (of course also!) to emigrate to England! You are in the country and can see to it that P. gets out. So please apply yourself to it in earnest. You know that we rely on you, you have to help!! We have had no mail from you. We will be writing a letter tomorrow. I am hoping to hear in your next letter that you are really doing something for Papi. Please confirm this to us as soon as you get this letter. Our entire hope rests with you. Many many 1000 kisses sends you your Eva who relies on you. My contribution to this postcard:

Dear Grete: Eva has already told you everything. Please make every effort and do your very best. Perhaps Mr. Laski could help you if you tried to turn to him. Who knows? I am very worried that again we have had no mail from you for eight days. Are you perhaps ill? Please write soon. 1000 kisses from your Ruth. On Friday we had a card from Papi.

Grete was powerless. The Hanoveranians she spoke to refused to see the urgency and made no effort to help. Fortunate to have reached England, they themselves must have been overwhelmed by their financial insecurity and unfamiliar surroundings. But having only recently escaped from Germany, they should have known that their new difficulties could not compare with the accelerating threats faced by their compatriots still in Germany. Although it required a mere 50 Pounds deposit in a bank, no offer of practical assistance was made. Help from British Jewry and the British government was too little and came too late.

Father's work seems to have become increasingly complex and time-consuming. As late as 1940, an additional bookkeeper had to be hired for the office. This is extraordinary since there were at most 2,000 Jews left in the congregation. It was probably due to the increasing demands of the Nazis for financial reporting to extract the last drop of Jewish resources.

War broke out on September third. We were still in Amsterdam, and plans were being made to send us refugee children to private families. Vaguely I sensed that this war would complicate our lives further and demand many sacrifices of us. I spoke of my fears to Trixie, who, at eighteen, was the oldest girl in the home. In response she slapped my face. I turned away in shock and disbelief. My eyes filled with tears. Her slap

burned my cheek. If only I had not said anything! I had probably touched on her own fears for the future, and this was the only answer she had.

The only immediate consequence of the war was that father now addressed all three of us in the letters he wrote us, and Grete used the same route in reverse. Letters to our relatives in Palestine went by way of Zurich where the Karos, old friends of ours who were Swiss citizens, had settled earlier.

By September sixth, Eva was copying father's first letter to Grete, because she did not want to part with the original. Later he would send a carbon copy to spare us the work of copying letters that were often one or two typewritten pages long. He urged us, but especially Grete, to obey all air raid sirens and not to take for granted that ..".she was safe because she lived in a hospital:"

Planes fly off course and even military hospitals were occasionally hit during 1914-1918. Act as if you were housed in a munitions factory rather than a hospital. Do not play the hero, [he demanded] you help no one and only injure yourself.

(A year later the nurses' residence in Manchester was demolished by a bomb. Fortunately Grete was visiting friends at the time.)

Family Bloemkoper

In early November '39 the director of the home told us that two Jewish families in Leyden had agreed to have Eva and me live with them. While we were going to be separated, these two families both lived on Thorbeckestraat. I did not mind leaving Amsterdam, but the thought of being separated from Eva made me quite apprehensive. The opportunity for us to live in private homes was envied by many of the girls who stayed behind. Less than a year later their own luck would change dramatically.

I felt that family Bloemkoper was pleased to see me. Three little boys looked me over curiously as their mother introduced us to each other: "This is Ruth, and this is Jacob, our oldest; he is five. This is four-year old Eli, and there, in the play pen, is our youngest, Abrammetje. He has just turned one." Missing in this line-up was their only girl, three-year old Roosje, who was visiting her grandparents in Amsterdam. All were dark haired and brown-eyed but did not otherwise look or act alike. I was excited to be with them, but not having had younger siblings or brothers, I had no idea what to expect. In Amsterdam I had enjoyed taking care of the two smallest boys, and I was sure that I would get to like these boys as well. Their father, Mijnheer Bloemkoper, was thirty and their mother, twenty-nine. They appeared older to me.

When father heard about our impending move to Leyden, he sent us instructions for our new surroundings: "Even if these families have help with their household chores, you must always be helpful. And if they have children, you must be sure to get on well with them." Whether as a result of his admonitions or not, I resolved to be on my very best behavior. And fear of doing something wrong made me act very diffidently. In Amsterdam, because I missed my mother, I had sought out the friendship of the aides, but it took me quite a while to feel at ease with Mevrouw Bloemkoper. They immediately asked me to call them "Aunt" and "Uncle". Try as I might, I could not do it and avoided calling them anything. Finally they promised me a bar of chocolate if I succeeded in calling them "Aunt" and "Uncle" - without backsliding - for a whole week. It was hard work but I earned my chocolate.

The Bloemkopers lived in a small, modern two-storied row house and I got their guest room in the attic. It had flowered wallpaper and simple white furniture, and I liked that room a lot. But it made me uncomfortable to have to share my bed with one or the other of Mvr. Bloemkoper's sisters when they came to visit. The house had small front and back gardens, and a few purple and white asters and wispy cosmos were still in bloom when I arrived. The living room and the rarely used front parlor were comfortably furnished. Compared to the large, old-fashioned house with its unwieldy furniture at home in Hanover, and the large halls of the Burgerweeshuis, everything seemed miniturized.

Mijn. Bloemkoper was the cantor, teacher and shochet (ritual slaughterer) of the small Jewish community. The family was strictly orthodox. Every Sabbath I attended the services led by Mijn. Bloemkoper. The small synagogue, while quite inconspicuous on the outside, had an interior of dark polished wood. The women's gallery was almost completely closed off, and little could be seen of the service in the sanctuary. But regardless of how much I might have liked the synagogue, the service meant little to me, because I could not warm to the different voice and unfamiliar melodies. The Dutch pronounced Hebrew slightly differently. (The "Ayin", a silent letter in our pronunciation, had a nasal "ng" sound in theirs.) I quickly became aware of real differences between the observances of religious Jews at home and those in Holland. It was inevitable that I would compare the religious customs of my parents with those of the Bloemkopers. And my parents always "fell short." This feeling was confirmed for me when the

Bloemkopers assured me that their way was the correct one. I did not want to feel critical of my parents, and these comparisons were painful and worried me.

Eva had come to a family of cattle dealers. While the Meijers lived in a similar house, they were more affluent than "my" family. They also had four children - but their oldest daughter, Gerda, was seventeen like our sister Grete, Harry was fifteen, and Ben one year older to the day than we. The youngest, Betty, was a beautiful, blond three-year old on whom the whole family doted.

A day or two after our arrival Mijn. Bloemkoper took both Eva and me to the local elementary school. It was pointed out to us with some pride that our school was located across the street from the Kamerlingh Onnes laboratory, named for the Dutch scientist of superconductivity. We were enrolled in the fifth grade - although we had completed it at home - to give us a chance to learn Dutch grammar. The elderly teacher seated us in the front row, and he worked hard to make us feel at ease. During dictation exercises, he pronounced every syllable with great precision and even greater patience to help us hear the nuances of the quite difficult Dutch spelling. He told us that, a long time ago, he had visited Hannover. When he showed us pictures of its famous Rathaus (city hall) and other sights with which we were familiar, he made me terribly home sick. But he meant well, and we learned quickly. Before long, we began to neglect our German. Father now listed the words we had misspelled in our letters to him. With some forbearance he added that he thought we were careless rather than ignorant. Actually, since we had no chance to read or study German, our spelling did become quite atrocious. But when Eva won a gulder and a half in a story contest, father delightedly reported the news to his friends, the Karos, in Zurich: He was not at all surprised, he wrote, because writing, rather than school work, had always been her strength. Her story of the friendship between a cat and a dog was pure invention, and all the more impressive since we had never owned a dog while our experience with a kitten was confined to a few weeks when we were in Geisa on vacation ...

The subjects I enjoyed most were Dutch history and art. For the first time I learned about the past of another people. Pivotal events were listed chronologically in separate booklets, and we were tested to see if we had memorized the dates. In art class we sight-copied small reproductions of old Dutch master drawings and etchings. When I was busy with my drawing I became totally oblivious of my surroundings and forgot my worries.

The Bloemkopers lived on a strict budget, and sometimes I worried that I might be eating too much. Actually my stay in their home may also have been of some help to them. I became a ready-made baby sitter. Their own parents were living in The Hague and in Amsterdam. The Dutch girl who helped in their household went home in the evening. At first this new responsibility scared me quite a bit, but while I never stopped being anxious about being alone with four small, lively children, I got used to this entirely new kind of worry. Eli and Abrammetje were my favorites. Eli was an extremely good-natured, thoughtful boy who never stopped asking questions about the relative sizes of the sun and moon. Since I did not know, he quickly thought of something else to ask. Little Abrammetje and I made friends immediately. Roosje was not deterred by being outnumbered. A comical little girl with glasses, she made good use of her sense of humor to defend herself against her three brothers. The oldest, Jacob, was rather sensitive and at times cranky, and he often complained of pain and cried when his parents went out in the evening. The "medicine" I gave him - my concoction of vinegar and some spices - was evidently vile enough to convince him that it would help.

I got used to my life in Leyden. It was years later that I questioned the cost of my adjustment which had helped to propel me into a premature "adulthood." Physically I hardly developed at all during the two years I spent with the Bloemkopers, and they seemed aware of my slow growth. In jest Mijn. Bloemkoper would check my index finger to see whether I was getting any fatter. Eva, who was now quite a bit taller than I, spent an occasional weekend with me, but she complained about being unhappy living with the Myers. She felt sure that she was not treated as an equal of the Myers' own children. She expressed herself openly, leaving little doubt about how she felt. We did not confide in our father because we did not want to worry him. However, since father and these two families corresponded, he was probably better informed than we knew. Occasionally Mvr. Bloemkoper added a few lines to the letters we wrote to Grete. The letters that Grete still has clearly show that she knew how we longed to be reunited with both Grete and father. Nevertheless, she told Grete not to worry too much about Eva who, she wrote, "liked" to complain about her life.¹

The tenth of May 1940 was a beautiful spring day. Three days earlier we had celebrated Mvr. Bloemkoper's thirtieth birthday, and a bunch of her favorite anemones still stood on the living room table. Very early in the morning, to my surprise, Mvr. Bloemkoper came upstairs to wake me. It was so sunny that I had trouble opening my eyes. She told me to hurry and take my clothes. "You can dress downstairs" she said very agitatedly. Sleepily I thought: Father must have come to fetch us home. That wish was never far from my thoughts. But it was Hitler who had invaded Holland. The Bloemkopers' first thought was of me sleeping in their little attic room because there was a real danger of a bombardment.

The next few days were filled with anxiety and rumors most of which turned out to be false. The radio and newspapers could offer little reassurance. We continued to fear German bombs, and the recurrent sound of *flak* (anti-aircraft fire) did not make us feel any more secure. Hitler, we had been told, would be stopped by the elaborate defense system of the Dutch. It was planned that, at a certain signal, the locks of a whole network of canals and rivers would open and flood the countryside to stop the advance of the invaders. Looking out of the window we saw small black shapes which turned into parachutists floating to earth. They were said to be German soldiers disguised as nuns and Dutch workmen. Landing well behind the Dutch defense lines, they pulled their weapons at the unsuspecting population and first sowed confusion and then death.

Only days later Holland had to capitulate. There was no defensive flood, the system had been sabotaged by an extensive fifth column operating behind Dutch lines. Queen Wilhelmina spoke to her people on the radio. Then she and her family fled to England.

The day of capitulation the Jewish community of Leyden made an attempt to flee to England. We all assembled in the Jewish orphanage - where Eva had recently moved from the Mijers - and spent a whole night camping out in the large lobby while we waited for a signal that there was a boat for us in IJmuiden - a harbor slightly northwest of Amsterdam. But there was no boat, and no crossing to safety for us. Early the next morning the Bloemkopers with their four young children and I, and the other families who had waited with us, walked home through the deserted streets. The little row houses with their neat flowering front yards looked totally peaceful, totally undisturbed. They seemed to inspire confidence that things would not be so bad. The Bloemkopers were immensely relieved to be back home among their familiar surroundings and possessions -

¹ Nor does any member of the Myer family with whom I am currently corresponding recall that Eva was in any way unhappy or disgruntled.

although only hours earlier they had hoped to reach England, fully prepared to leave everything behind. I did not tell them I was disappointed that we had to stay.

Meanwhile in Amsterdam Mvr. Wijsmuller persuaded the captain of a Dutch freighter in IJmuiden to take a group of Jews on board. He agreed and helped around 200 Jewish men and women, among them 80 German Jewish refugee children from the Burgerweeshuis, to flee to England.²

Until Hitler's attack on Holland letters from father to Grete continued to come to us or went by way of Zurich. On February 25, 1940 father had written her:

Dearest Gretelchen:

The Little Ones have told me that you continue to write them regularly. I think that is very nice of you, especially since I know how many demands are being made on your time. In one week they received three letters from you, which Ruth reported with three exclamation points, proof that it was a big thrill for them. I am thinking that with your 18th birthday on April 10th, your training period is approaching. I assume that this has not changed. I am counting on your receiving some credit at the end of your training for your work since October 1939. -- Please write to Iszo [the uncle in Palestine whose life, in 1937, had briefly intersected with ours and who had consequently secured an English permit for father in 1939] if he could not arrange my and my wife's emigration *to any country*. The child [Lotte] is soon to leave for the U.S. so no intermediate stop over is needed for her. Iszo should get in touch with Uncle Akos *if* he needs to. I would like to work on our emigration so that I can again have you children with me. Wherever it is to be I shall strive to have that wish fulfilled. We are all well, thank God, and our days are taken up with a great deal of work. Some times they are too short. I practice voice technique, have heard Jan Kipura for the first time. His voice sounds rather worn in the higher register, at least that is how the record sounds. In the middle range where he sings more softly he can be bewitching.

I send you fondest greetings - your ever loving Father

Eva and I caught the urgency of his appeal, and both of us pleaded with Grete to write to Uncle Iszo "immediately and without fail" and to "keep up her correspondence with him" to remind him of father. Eva's eloquent letter to Margaret shows her at her best. She advises Grete, by six years her senior, to be polite but insistent! Father evidently expected that Lotte would get her visa for the U.S. since she had a low quota number. By fall he reported that our friends, the Kaunitz family, had succeeded in leaving for the U.S. in the summer of 1940.

Winters in Leyden did not seem as hard as in Amsterdam although my attic room was quite cold, and only the living room had a heating element. Eva and I learned to skate, and while we could get all the way to school on our simple wooden skates, Eva enjoyed that activity much more than I.

Summer vacations in Leyden were spent at home except for day trips to amusement parks. One of my trips to a playground ended unexpectedly. While waiting my turn, a boy on a heavy, boat-shaped metal swing hit me full force on my forehead.

² Martin Gilbert, The Holocaust, p. 120.

When I came to I was in the emergency room of a local hospital. At the Bloemkopers I was installed on the second floor in the children's room. Lying still for four weeks to cure my headache was rather boring because I was not allowed to read. Several weeks after I had recovered, Eva crossed a busy street in front of a bus, and unable to see an oncoming car, got hit and catapulted on top of its hood. She was badly shaken up and bruised but miraculously escaped other serious injury. Now it was my turn to visit her, and she too soon recovered. When father heard about these accidents, he became extremely alarmed and wrote to both families imploring them to take good care of us.

The Nazi occupation in Holland incrementally curtailed our ability to move about and live normally. However, father could now send us money for clothes and, separately, reimburse the Bloemkopers for some of the expenses they had incurred on my behalf. Pleased with this development, the Bloemkopers put these funds into a special account but never made use of them. In late spring 1941 Eva and I graduated from the sixth and final year of elementary school. For several weeks during the summer the principal of our school coached his daughter and me to take the entrance examination for the HBS (high school). I was happy when the news arrived that I had passed. Mvr. Bloemkoper served vanilla pudding - usually a Sabbath treat! But my happiness did not last. Hitler's racial laws had caught up with me. Jews were no longer permitted to enroll at the high school. Eva planned to go to a Froebel school to begin training as a Kindergarten teacher, but this too was no longer possible. The Bloemkopers then decided that I should learn sewing and take courses in mathematics and English. Alternate plans for Eva were to be made by the orphanage.

During the first days of November 1941 Eva and I received a terse letter of instruction from father:

You are to pack and return to Hanover immediately.

We were given the name of an official whom we had to see for our travel papers. I was too excited and preoccupied with this new development to feel very sad at having to part from family Bloemkoper. The thought that I was soon going to be with father again took precedence over everything else. Still, it hurt to say goodbye to Abrammetje. He was now three years old, and I had helped watch over him for much of his short life. When would I see him again? When he cried, his mother comforted him: "Ruth will come back when the war is over" which the Dutch express as "when the war passes [by]".

Back in Hanover

On November 7, Eva and I arrived in Hanover's central railroad station from where we had left Hanover almost three years earlier. Father was nowhere to be seen. A tall, straight-backed woman was walking alongside the train. She caught sight of us and waved. It was Mania, our stepmother. She was relieved to have found us. The first thing I saw was the yellow patch on her coat. The word, "Jude" was imprinted in black in the center of the yellow Magen David (Star of David). She was anxious to get us home. While we lived not far from the station, she was worried to have to walk through a busy section of town with the two of us who, while obviously Jewish, wore no star. She explained that father had to be in town on urgent business. We would see him later. Eva and I were terribly disappointed. Carrying our suitcases, we quietly walked home.

When we entered our house we found the familiar surroundings greatly changed. To my surprise there were people everywhere. Although the year before father had mentioned in one of his letters that several families, including Lore Pels, a school friend of ours, had moved into some of the school rooms, we did not really grasp what this meant and were unprepared for what we found. Along the walls of both flights of stairs, all kinds of chests of drawers and cabinets were propped up, leaving a much narrower staircase.

In our own apartment one wing was occupied by other people. Our family still had the two bedrooms, a small living room and the kitchen. How exceptional this wealth of space was I would soon learn. The grand piano -- under which I remembered crouching to listen to Grete play -- was no longer there. Mania took us into the kitchen and asked if we were hungry. We did not feel like eating.

Finally the kitchen door opened and father stuck in his head. He explained that he had been detained by the "Behörde" (the authorities; one of his euphemisms for the Gestapo). He was very tired. I was shocked when I saw him. The changes in the house had not prepared me for how changed he appeared to me. He was smaller, his hair much whiter than I remembered. Father held us close to him and kissed us. Still I felt safe in his embrace and happy to be with him again.

Our stepmother spoke to us in a controlled, cool manner. I thought that her slightly accented speech had a harsh sound, but, unlike our mother's, her German was grammatically perfect. Her daughter appeared to be a young adult next to us. Lotte, who was not quite sixteen, had dark brown hair and dark, almond-shaped eyes, and she was almost a head taller than her tall mother. Smiling shyly, she shook hands with us. I thought I could like Lotte, but I could not tell how Lotte felt about meeting Eva and me.

From father's conversation with Mania we gathered that there no longer was any chance for our family to go to Cuba. His hope to be able to emigrate to Cuba had been the reason for his request that we be allowed to return to Hanover. Had we arrived home too late and, if so, had our lateness prevented their timely departure? We did not ask and father did not say. (From Zurich our friends, the Karos, wrote to Grete in Manchester that they expected we would be reaching Cuba any day now.) Less than a month earlier,

a small group of Hanoveranians had managed to leave for Cuba. They may have been the last to reach safety. A year earlier father and Mania fully expected that Lotte would emigrate to the United States. Her emigration was no longer even mentioned. Actually, two weeks before our return, by a secret decree, dated October 23, 1941, of the Reichssicherheitshauptamt, the central SS office in Berlin under Himmler, prohibited, "without exception" all Jewish emigration from Germany and its occupied territories. Nevertheless, father's ability to bring us home, regardless of whether he knew of that decree or not, was to be decisive for Eva and me.

Since father had no common language other than German with Polish-born Mania, Eva and I understood far more of their conversations and concerns than we had of those of our parents before we went to Holland. Father seemed harassed and impatient. Eva and I had not spoken German with each other for at least a year, and now too we often lapsed into Dutch. Irritated, father said that he disliked the recurring, guttural "ch" sound, and he asked us to speak German. He encouraged us not to forget Dutch - we just shouldn't practice it in his presence. Neither of us reminded him of his habit of speaking Hungarian with our late mother.

Two months before our return, Lützowstrasse 3, the community house, had been transformed into one of the 16 "Judenhäuser" (Jew houses) for the remnants of the Jewish community. For almost twenty years, our family made its home on the third floor. In the dining room, on a couch our mother had occasionally pointed out to us, both sets of twins were born. Now, like the other "Jew houses," our house served as collection point or way-station, hardly more than a holding pen, for almost one hundred persons, young and old, both families and single individuals. They had been evicted from their own houses and apartments. We were appalled to see under what conditions so many people were existing - and in an instant the image I had held of our home was destroyed.¹

The two class rooms on the ground floor housed several families. The same was true for the second floor classrooms and the library. In our apartment which had occupied the entire floor, eighteen men and women were "living" in the dining room. A small number tried to fit into the much smaller "Herrenzimmer" (father's study) next to it. Two small rooms, the maid's quarters years ago, were also occupied. People were even sleeping in our attic. They seemed to prefer its privacy but had to breathe the dust and dirt of age-old storage. Those living in our apartment cooked on small cookers in the vestibule, and, once in a while, at the invitation of Mania, in our kitchen. They shared the one toilet and bath with us. The people living in the school rooms and offices had to use toilets located in the school yard, the only ones available. I do not know whether they were able to bathe unless they used the mikvah (ritual bath) in the basement. The few toilet facilities of which the house could boast must have been considered adequate for its original purpose when it was built by Edwin Oppler in 1875. The mikvah itself

¹ I have since learned that these measures, taken by the local Nazi leadership of Hanover, both anticipated and exceeded the official decrees of the Reich. See, Marlis Buchholz, Die hannoverschen Juden Häuser. Zur Situation der Juden in der Zeit der Ghettoisierung und Verfolgung 1941 bis 1945. Hildesheim, 1987.

was a later addition to the house. Conditions in the other "Judenhäuser" were as bad, and in some cases, worse.

Our children's room was also changed. But its wall paper was the same and reminded me of how often I had stared at its winding, flowery pattern. Once I had "seen" a threatening figure hidden in its trellises it became difficult to see the pattern in any other way. Our small desks at which we had done our homework and where I used to hide Grete's books were gone. Once when I had gotten up very early and sat reading at my desk I found a piece of a cookie on my desk. Not until I had gobbled it up did I realize that it was Yom Kippur! For a while I was so overcome by guilt, I could not think. After a while I hoped that God would not remember or that He did not bear grudges... Lotte used Grete's old bed. But one of our beds had been given away. Eva and I had to share the one remaining bed. At first we quarreled quite a bit over space, but then we learned how to be a little more accommodating - a skill that was to prove useful during the next few years.

Despite these troubling changes in our living arrangements and the evident misery of those sharing our quarters, I was intensely relieved to be reunited with father. The comfort I derived from being near him cushioned the impact of the upheaval that surrounded us. But the restlessness and tension in our house and the uncertainty and worry I often felt soon absorbed all my attention. It blotted out the years I spent in Holland and the friends I had left behind until sometime during December when, in short succession, I received two letters from Mvr. Bloemkoper in Leiden.

Mvr. Bloemkoper wrote that three-year old Abrammetje often stood at the bay window of the front parlor and watched the street. Patiently he was waiting for the war to pass [by] because "then Ruth will come back." And his mother fervently shared his wish. Her hastily written second letter sounded extremely anxious. The family was no longer together: Mijnheer Bloemkoper had been taken to Westerbork. She also expected to be leaving for Westerbork shortly with her four small children. I had no idea where Westerbork was or what it meant. (It was the Dutch camp and collection point where Dutch Jewry was concentrated before being deported to points East.) Worried, I asked father. He could give me no explanation. It was the last time I heard from them.

Mania took me up on my offer of help with her chores. I was to dust and straighten out our bedrooms. She told me to take a dust cloth from a small room next to the kitchen which used to be our pantry. Among the odds and ends and cloths lying in a corner for house cleaning I found my mother's navy blouse with the tiny flowers. She wore it when our father took us for a family photograph on the last day we were together on January 3, 1939, the day before we went to Holland. I touched the soft navy blue binding around its neck and took another cloth for my work.

Like my own mother, Mania must have liked reading in bed, because Vom Winde Verweht (Gone with the Wind) was open on her night table. So I dawdled, reading and dusting by turns. The story quickly transported me to a time and place so alien and distant, it might have been happening on a different planet. When I finally returned to

myself and my work, I thought of my mother's blouse, and I could not shake off my sadness.

I was as inquisitive as ever, and one day when Mania sent me to clean up their bedroom, I found old letters Vati had received and copies of those he had sent. I was both puzzled and hurt to read a letter from some German authorities telling father that our sister Klara had died of Ruhr (dysentery) early in 1941. Ruhr, I knew, was a disease one contracts in unsanitary conditions. Klara was said to have died in "Cholm, near Lublin" in Poland.² This was strange. In 1934 Klara was taken to a Catholic home for the mentally retarded in Bavaria when the Christian family in Norderney was no longer allowed to take care of her. Father had deposited a substantial sum of money in escrow (in German: Kaution, a word my parents had to explain to me) to ensure her upkeep in the event he were to emigrate.³

Another letter informed father that his mother, our Oma Cillie, had died on a visit to Tel Aviv. As she had wished, Uncle Iszo had taken her remains to Jerusalem for burial on Mount Olive. It hurt me to read these letters, but I could not speak to anyone about them since my discoveries were the result of my snooping. I had to keep my pain to myself. I also found some love letters and poems father had written to Mania in the summer of 1939. For the first time it dawned on me that he was a person with a life of his own. When I thought of him, how he looked now, gray-faced and exhausted, I was glad that he had experienced some personal happiness before his world had begun to crumble as it was doing right now, in front of my eyes.

Like those chests and wardrobes propped up and wobbling on our staircase, an atmosphere of uncertainty and fear, of provisional arrangements and anxious anticipation was all around us. Mania told me about some of the changes that had occurred during our stay in Holland: Sometime between September 1939 and November 1941 father's salary had stopped. I was not surprised to hear that he had no resources since he had literally given to those in need every penny he, and we, did not need. We now were living on a portion of Lotte's inheritance from her father. When Vati and Mania married in 1939 and she saw how modest and old-fashioned our furnishings were, she persuaded him to buy two easy chairs and a small table to refurbish the living room. She also brought her Persian rugs and Hutschenreuter dinnerware with her. It was obvious that these tokens of wellbeing could no longer assuage her anxiety. Despite her deep reserve I sensed that at times she was both angry and despaired.

² I tried without success to find Cholm on a map of Poland. Then I found two independent confirmations that this fictitious town named in the notification was a non-existent asylum invented by T-4, i.e., the Berlin office in charge of the euthanasia program: Uwe D. Adams, in Francois Furet, ed., Unanswered Questions, New York, 1989. H.Immenkötter, Menschen aus unserer Mitte. Die Opfer von Zwangssterilisierungen und Euthanasia im Dominikus-Ringeisen-Werk Ursberg, L. Auer, Donauworth, 1992. The latter mentions Klärchen and includes a picture of her and another Jewish boy.

³ We now know that he assigned the cash value of his life insurance for that purpose.

I found Mania not difficult to get along with if I agreed with what she said and spoke with her of what was on her mind. I did my very best to please her and to win her approval. Mania was not demonstrative and showed little warmth, so my sole gain was the peace among the five of us which I was hoping to maintain. I disliked the disagreements that sometimes flared up for what I thought were trivial reasons. Eva, a different and prouder nature, wanted to have little to do with Mania, and remained barely within the bounds of politeness with her.

Eva and I were beginning to grow apart. I could no longer assume that I knew instantly and automatically what she was thinking. Even though we had always competed for Vati's affection when we were younger, it now puzzled me to see Eva compete with Lotte. Lotte and Vati got on quite well with each other, and it seemed to me that he understood her better than her own mother. But most of the time, father was too distracted to notice any of us.

A few weeks after our return from Holland, an acquaintance of father, a Jewish man married to a Christian woman, visited us. Herr S. was interested in good health and nature "cures." He strongly urged me to throw away those "miserable crutches" - by which he meant my glasses. He told me to do eye exercises and to focus as much as I could on the color green. My vanity was aroused, and before long I stopped wearing my glasses. Father was suspicious of these theories and perhaps of the man's motives. He warned me not to discard my glasses. I disobeyed him. It was my first attempt at independence, and the time would come when I regretted it. After his initial opposition, father did not even seem to notice that my glasses were no longer on my nose. Eventually the glasses were lost. I had worn glasses since the age of nine and not until I was eighteen did I get another pair.

We had been home for a short while when the German government decreed that all Jews who owned fur coats, mountain boots and similar items were to "donate" them for the winter campaign then underway against the USSR. The anteroom to the mikvah in the basement was used to store the coats and other goods that were brought to us for delivery to the Nazi authorities. Our stepmother's elegant black Persian lamb coat hung next to the long sable-trimmed broadtail coat of her late mother delivered by Clara Berliner. Father relinquished the heavy boots he had worn in happier times on his hikes in the mountains. Mania was extremely upset to lose her most precious possession: her Persian lamb coat represented the proceeds of the sale of her real estate consisting, she said, of three houses she had been forced to sell in 1939. Because her first husband had long been ailing -- if I remember rightly as a result of injuries sustained during World War I -- Mania had managed his business. She had been very astute and succeeded in increasing their holdings. She told me that the coat had been especially made for her, because she thought that once she was abroad it could be turned into cash to feed the family. We were sitting in the kitchen the evening before the collection began, and Mania was fretting about having to give up her fur coat. In her anguish she said to father: "If I cannot take my fur coat, I won't emigrate!" Father's retort was instant and terse: "If I could, I would leave today - in my underwear." (Wenn ich es könnte, ging ich heute, in meinen Unterhosen!).

Father was not himself. He seemed troubled and preoccupied. We were so used to hearing him vocalize or hum; now he was silent most of time. His face had lost all color, and he walked with a limp. All he would tell us was that he had more work than usual. "Go, go. Be good children and help Mania with her chores."

It may have been late November when the reason for his desperate wish to leave became clearer to us. He had been told by the Gestapo that 1,000 Jews were to be "resettled" in the "East." Despite the use of these euphemisms, it was known that the destination for this deportation was Riga. (From most German cities the first Jewish transports numbered approximately 1,000 each and many went to Riga, Minsk and Lodz.) People in our community must have learned about these events, since these transports had started in October, and the Hanover transport was originally scheduled for an earlier date. All those on the transport list were required, some time before their departure, to make a detailed disclosure of their possessions. Father spent even longer hours in his office. I heard a great deal of talk about lists. These lists enumerated the names of all the men, women and children who had been "chosen" to be deported. For more than forty years I assumed that it was father who was required to make up the lists of names for this, and subsequent, transports. In 1989 I learned it might be the Gestapo who assembled the lists and handed them to father. At the moment of writing, this is not a certainty either.⁴

Father, in any event, prepared an instruction sheet which he mimeographed and gave to the members of our congregation who were to be deported to Riga. He asked members of the community to act in a communal spirit toward each other despite the hardships they might encounter. Among other topics I read his advice regarding problems of hygiene under less than optimal conditions. His statement that one's urine could be used as a disinfectant was disturbing and puzzling to me.

Five rucksacks of drab olive canvas with leather reinforcements and leather straps, especially made for each of us, appeared in our living room. Father seems to have requested that we be allowed to join this transport on which a majority of the remnant of our Jewish community in Hanover was to leave. The Gestapo denied his request. This denial could hardly have failed to be a signal for father that they fully intended to continue making use of him.

On December 11, Lotte's sixteenth birthday, she, Eva and I helped carry rucksacks and suitcases downstairs. The day everyone had been dreading had arrived. Several

⁴ Buchholz, op.cit. At this writing (1998), evidence has come to light that suggests that the local office of the Reichsvereinigung der Juden in Deutschland (the last Jewish organization which had had to subsume all Jewish communities and which was controlled by the Gestapo) may have had to complete the lists at the behest of the Gestapo.

people committed suicide. The Gestapo took one thousand individuals from the different Judenhäuser on the streetcar, used by the German population, to the horticultural school (Gartenbauschule) Ahlem before they were put on freight trains. Lotte went along to Ahlem to help. They were deported on the 15th. During those four days, after being bodily searched for any possible valuables they might have had on their persons, anxiously waiting in unspeakable, crowded conditions, they got a foretaste of what was in store for them.

Our house was silent and empty after the people were taken away. The next day Eva and I were sent to clean the rooms in our house and in some of the other houses that had served as Judenhäuser and now stood empty. Father helped us. I felt acutely uncomfortable in those eery deserted rooms and father tried in vain to put me at ease. I was too troubled by what I saw. An odd assortment of stuff was scattered about: an old doll, a colorful silk blouse, a leather case for sewing thread. Amidst the chaos, these things, left behind by the men and women who until a few days ago occupied these rooms, were proof of how their owners had clung to their old ways and last possessions. Now they had been forced to relinquish even these vestiges of their former lives. I was startled out of my reverie when several Gestapo men suddenly strode through the room. They checked if anything of value had been overlooked. One of them made straight for some bottles left on a dresser and, after a quick look at their labels, thirstily drank any hair tonic that contained alcohol.

Lotte and the two of us were sent to work in what remained of the Jewish hospital. It now served as an old age home. Lotte and Eva made beds and swept the rooms, and I helped the cook and washed huge pots in the kitchen. The home was desperately short of staff. One evening we reported to father that the customary afternoon coffee was no longer being served to the residents and that they missed it terribly. Father asked Mania to bake some yeast cakes (Hefekuchen), and we took these and Ersatz coffee to the home. The old people were delighted when they were served this unexpected treat by the five of us. Father intended to show those responsible for their care that, with some extra effort, it was still possible to provide nourishment and diversion for these old people who were so much in need of both. While his gesture was totally in character for him, it was hardly calculated to make him popular with the person in charge.

Early in 1942 we were moved from Lützowstrasse 3 to Ohestrasse 8. That complex actually included two buildings which were owned by the Jewish community and had previously served as the day care center and Welfare office. We took only our household items - and no furniture. I never saw our home again. (The house is said to have been destroyed in the fall of 1943, in the first of a series of massive bombing raids that were to hit Hanover.) There were several elderly Jewish women living in the other Ohestrasse building. Our relocation was evidence, if any was needed, that the Gestapo meant to concentrate the remnant of Hanover's Jewry in ever fewer locations so as to make controlling us absolutely foolproof.

Late in February we again saw those tell-tale signs in our father's demeanor. Although as usual he did not confide in us, the change in expression in his face was

striking. It told us what he would not divulge. It was as if this once so robust man was shrinking. There was the same limp of whose origin we were completely ignorant. Clearly another transport was being prepared. We heard that the destination was Warsaw, later it was said to have been Trawniki, then it reverted back to Warsaw. Mrs. Minnie Hahn's name was on the list. Her husband must have died earlier. It seems that her mother, my old blind friend, was also fortunate to have died so that she did not have to go on that final journey to Poland. Whether their only son managed to emigrate I do not know.

On Purim in the Ohestrasse house, father organized a get-together for the few remaining Jews with whom we lived together. Mania served her cakes. She had managed to make "Hamantaschen" (a traditional pastry) despite a shortage of many of the proper ingredients. I do not think that father read the Megillah. It may no longer have been permitted to Jews to hold religious services. He regaled the old people with songs and arias of Lorzing operas, such as "Auch ich war ein Jüngling mit lockigem Haar." (At one time I too was a young man with curly hair.) The old ladies nodded, smiled, and applauded. For Passover, miraculously, Mania obtained some flour and instructed and supervised by her, we girls baked our own matzos.

I had another chance to see with what pronounced, almost exaggerated courtesy father treated elderly women. One of them, a tall thin woman often came to speak to him. She lived in a tiny room under the roof all by herself and suffered of rheumatism. She was a Hungarian citizen. He invited her to share our seder. Mania and we three girls would have preferred to be by ourselves. Long after she had left the room, a pungent smell of the wintergreen ointment she used for her rheumatic pains lingered in the air. We girls held our noses, but father scolded us severely. For the first time since we came back from Holland, I saw flashes of the old anger.

During this time Mania was receiving letters from her sister and brother in Poland. Her brother, a lawyer, had lived in Cracow with his wife and only son. When the Germans invaded Poland he and his family were on vacation. Unable to return home, he and his family were stranded in Przemysl without any means of support. Invariably his news was heartbreaking. One day Mania showed me a photograph he had managed to send her. She told me that he had been a very successful and prosperous man, but his picture showed a bearded face, emaciated and marked by suffering. Mania, usually so composed, was terribly upset. Although she said that he had sent her the picture to rouse her to action, she realized that he was in a pitiful state. She began making up parcels for him with sheets and pillow cases and some non-perishable food stuffs. To mail them, she used fictitious return addresses. She warned me not to tell father because he would surely worry about the possibility that her subterfuge would be discovered. Her brother thanked her profusely when he acknowledged receiving some of these packages. He wrote that he waited with such obvious anxiety for the mailman that he could not have failed arousing the man's suspicions. He was convinced that the mailman eventually stole several of these packages. A sister of Mania and her family were in Ghetto of Lvov. I think she lost touch with both families before the end of 1942.

Ahlem

Some time at the end of June 1942 we had to move again. This time we were sent to Ahlem, the Jewish horticultural school just outside city limits. The school was founded in 1893 by Alexander Moritz Simon, a banker and Jewish philanthropist, to teach (mostly poor) Jewish youth the skills of agriculture and horticulture.. Some manual trades, such as bookbinding and shoe repair, were also taught. In the nineteen thirties the school served as a Hachscharah (training) for Palestine. By the time we were moved there, all formal education for Jews had been outlawed. While Eva continued for a while to go to Hanover to work in the hospital cum old age home, Lotte and I went to work on the land and in the greenhouses.

When we arrived in Ahlem we found that aside from Dr. Max Schleisner, the last President of the Jewish community, his wife and their oldest daughter Eva, the Jewish population of the school was reduced to the former director, Levy Rosenblatt and his family, two handicapped young men, and a married couple named Blankenburg. In addition there were two young men, Helmut Bloch and Oskar Windmüller, former horticultural students, and the mother of one of them, a Mrs. Bloch. While I have no recollection of seeing them, I have since been told that there were at least one hundred other Jews living in Ahlem at that time.

Fritz Blankenburg had been a judge (Amtsgerichtsrat) and he and his wife, Erika, became gardeners when he was forbidden to work in his profession. Even his gardening was done in a methodical, lawyerly fashion. Theirs was a "mixed marriage", but Mrs. Blankenburg was a convert to Judaism, and she refused to return to her original faith. They always spoke with happiness and relief of their good fortune -- and good sense -- to have sent their two intelligent and accomplished young daughters to England in 1939. They taught me a good bit about gardening, and I became their willing apprentice. Fritz Blankenburg, a lanky man with boyish features accentuated by slightly protruding front teeth, liked to expound on theories of law while we were working in the greenhouse or packing hotbeds to "force" rhubarb. (The hotbed created the opportunity to grow something out of season.) If he guessed it, he was undeterred by my total incomprehension. All he required of me was silence. Meanwhile I thought of how much school time I had already missed, and for the first time, though hardly for the last, I had a gnawing sense of regret that I would never be able to learn the things that interested me. And I felt a twinge of envy for those two lucky girls in England whom I had never met.

I worked hard in the greenhouses where we raised tomatoes, cucumbers, tulips and amaryllis among other vegetables and flowers, and I carried heavy watering cans and pushed wheelbarrows heaped high with compost or soil. While I worked alongside her, Frau Blankenburg taught me the different methods for propagating begonias and hydrangeas. She was calm and fair, and every task became a lesson on the needs of the plants we grew. Outdoors I helped plant large fields with a variety of cabbages and other vegetables. We harvested buckets of red currants, and although almost all had to be turned in, Mania made jelly with what little we were allowed to keep. Cherries were grown espalier fashion and were especially beautiful and tasty. We also had many varieties of pear trees. Much of our harvest was the result of the devoted labor of students and their teachers over a period of many years. If we were supervised by a

German official, I do not recall that I ever saw him or that he interfered in our work. In this way, from the summer of 1942 to late spring 1943, over a period of eleven months, I experienced one complete cycle of the seasons, sowing, weeding and watering, and harvesting. It was my first experience of hard work, and I enjoyed doing it and being responsible for my tasks. Every evening I collapsed on my bed, physically exhausted but mentally alert and eager for my books.

The three of us kept - but did not eat - rabbits. One morning we were horrified to discover that Lotte's pure bred white, blue-eyed rabbit had smothered its only offspring. Lotte and I wondered whether such things happened accidentally. Eva and I had an ordinary, brown and white rabbit that was happily nursing her large litter.

The group of Jews who lived in Ahlem seemed no longer to constitute a Jewish community. No services were held, and the Jewish holidays passed without observance. But I also remember no instances of any one getting together, any conversations among us, who were the remnants of what once had been a vibrant community. The air raid shelter seemed to be our only meeting place. It is impossible to say whether the Jewish adults feared and mistrusted each other, or whether it was the anxiety and uncertainties that enveloped us all: who would be the Nazis' next victim for deportation?

I heard father sing two songs: one Yiddish, called "Teut is a kim oif der velt, ain toiter kan nit werden oifgestellt," etc. (Death has come to the world and a dead [person] cannot be resurrected). The song ends with the words: Whether one seeks pleasure or bread - death is at the end of the road. The other was a German song, "Kein Haus, keine Heimat, kein Weib und kein Kind, so wirb'1 ich, ein Strohalm, durch Nacht und durch Wind." (Without house or homeland, without wife or child, like a blade of straw I drift through night and wind)⁵. Unlike the Yiddish songs we used to hear father sing in which comic and tragic elements mingled, these songs had an unrelieved, terrible sadness. It was not difficult to imagine what father was expressing.

When father called me a compromiser because I had less trouble getting along with Mania than Eva, I thought I knew that he was making excuses for Eva. She liked to assert her independence and fought anyone's attempt to direct her. When I proudly showed father the new muscles in my upper arms, he understood this as my unhappiness over developing so much more slowly than Eva. He consoled me by telling me to be patient: He recalled that he had not begun to grow and mature until he was eighteen. For the first time, he also spoke to me about our late mother, and he made me very happy when he asked me: "Do you know that your mother was a very musical and highly intelligent woman?"

Outside the building in which we lived, there stood a large wooden overseas shipping crate, called a lift. Its owner, Siegfried Bacharach, the long time editor of the Jüdische Nachrichtenblatt, the local Jewish Community newspaper, and a bookseller, had given father the key when he and his wife managed to leave for Cuba in the fall of 1941, among the last to do so. Occasionally father opened it for us, and when we walked

⁵ Brahms, Op.94, no. 5.

into the rectangular, shed-like structure, we were surrounded by books. Father gave me stories by Stefan Zweig, novels by Jakob Wassermann, Warren Deeping and John Galsworthy. I read Sammy Gronemann's *Tohuwabohu*, (the expression for Chaos in Genesis) in which he describes the life of turn-of-the-century Berlin Jewry and the impact of the arrival and settling of Polish Jews in their midst. Its humorous tone greatly appealed to me. But it also contained familiar problems with which I had grown up. Once as we were looking for suitable books, father said: "Here, you Romantic, is Heine for you." In the *Buch der Lieder* (Book of Songs) I found the words to songs I had heard father sing when we were little: "Der Asra," (a mysterious young slave who belongs to a tribe that dies when it loves), "Morgens steh' ich auf und frage," (In the morning I rise and ask), and "Leise flehen meine Lieder" (Softly my songs beseech) and "Die Zwei Grenadiere" (The Two Grenadiers). Father pointed out his own favorites, such as the scathingly satirical "Donna Clara," and "the Disputation," and talked of Heine's prose writings: Heine wrote about his travels after he visited the Island of Norderney and the Harz mountains, cultural events in Paris and other subjects in a prose style that equalled and at times surpassed his poetry. But because he was a Jew, and the Nazis would not acknowledge his greatness, German song books of the nineteen thirties attributed the authorship of the popular "Lorelei" among other songs to "Anonymous." These occasional forays into the lift with father and the few conversations we managed to have helped me to define myself as distinct from my twinship with Eva. In the process I also began to observe my environment a little less and to pay more and more attention to myself and my feelings.

When the next transport was assembled in Ahlem in July 1942, a month after we were moved there, we only had to look closely at father to know what was going to happen: the news was there in his haunted, sad eyes and posture. This was the first Theresienstadt transport from Hanover which arrived in that ghetto at a time when it was terribly overcrowded, and many of these very old men and women were almost immediately sent to their death in Minsk. The people we knew in Ahlem were deported to Theresienstadt in March of 1943. These included the remaining elderly, (disabled) veterans of World War I, the director of Ahlem, Levy Rosenblatt and his family; Clara, the only surviving offspring of Joseph Berliner; and Dr. Max Schleisner and his wife and daughter Eva. Jews who lived in the few remaining Judenhäuser in the city were brought to Ahlem. This was the routine for each transport. However, this was the first time Eva and I saw the extent of the commotion, unhappiness and discomfort of a large group of people, confined in crammed and wholly inadequate quarters and expecting even greater miseries and hardships to come. The makeshift conditions lasted "only" a few days, but they were enough to cause intense fear and anxiety, in anticipation of the journey "East."

An old beggar woman, Frau Rothenberg, who had come to see my mother every Friday afternoon as far back as I could remember, was included in the earlier of the two transports. Frau Rothenberg would sit at our kitchen table, drink a cup of coffee and make a pretence of selling mother some shoe laces and shoe polish. Then, with some relish, she reported her dealings with other members of the community: her "wishes" for them depended on how she judged their generosity, or lack of it, toward her: "May Frau A. gain a pound a week, and Herr B. lose a pound..." (Frau A. was fat, Herr B. thin, and neither measured up to her standards of philanthropy.) Weekly, mother gave her a

challah and Frau Rothenberg thanked her by asking for some butter to go with it: the size of a walnut ("a Nuss gross" as she put it). After she had tucked the bread and butter safely into her basket among the shoe laces and sundries, she pronounced a blessing on mother. Then she left and we heard the clop, clop of her high laced boots as she made her way downstairs to father's office. She knew he would have her weekly money for her. Her husband, considerably younger than she, relied entirely upon her peddling and begging or so we understood. Now she was here in Ahlem, as always wrapped in a black knitted shawl, wearing voluminous layered woolen skirts, her wispy white hair held in a tiny knot on top of her head. Her voice was still as shrill, and we heard how peremptorily and in no uncertain terms, she called on her husband Rudolf to help her with her toilet needs. She was very frail and was around 87 years old - her husband was only 79. Although only a few years had passed, those Fridays at home in Lützowstrasse and Frau Rothenberg's weekly visits to our mother belonged to another world. There was almost no one left to connect us to that time.

The two handicapped young men who lived in Ahlem were among this group of men and women who were to be deported: one was a blind merchant marine. Malaria treatment for syphilis was said to have caused his blindness. When we knew him he was quite well and of sturdy build. The other man was confined to a wheelchair. The two men were friends, and they depended on each other to get around. It was the blind man who would gather his paralyzed friend in his arms and put him in the wheelchair. Early on the morning of the transport, or perhaps the day before, the young man in the wheelchair disappeared. Father knew that he could not have left Ahlem without the help of his blind friend. The blind man denied any knowledge of his friend's whereabouts. Father explained to him that unless his friend was found, someone else would have to take his place in the transport. The blind man reiterated that he did not know what had happened to his friend. Aside from one other person, Dr. Hans Meyer, who was rumored to have fled to Switzerland, but is now said to have been hidden in Ahlem all along, among the Jews of Hanover the only people who put up any kind of resistance to what the Nazis were about to do began and ended with the action of these two Jews, one blind, the other lame.

The upshot was that father walked for hours all over Hanover. He found the young man in his wheelchair in the Tiergarten, a park at the other end of town and returned with him to Ahlem. If nothing else, this episode confirmed for me that the Gestapo made father responsible for the delivery of the deportees.

Lotte developed a friendship with Helmut Bloch, one of the two remaining young Jewish gardeners, who was 19 years old. She had met him first when she accompanied the people from our house to Ahlem in December. She and Helmut discovered that they shared a birthday. Helmut was blond, wiry, and much shorter than Lotte. I believe that he was acutely conscious of that difference in their height and exerted pressure on her to "prove" her love for him despite of it. Father occasionally told Mania that he was worried about this friendship. He said Lotte was spending too much time alone with Helmut. His concern seemed lost on Mania who pleaded for her daughter, and father was too preoccupied and busy to insist on a change.

Among all the other worries father had to cope with was the Gestapo's disconcerting habit of suddenly showing up in Ahlem. They came to demand quantities of its produce and fruit. Not content with an ample supply of produce, they asked that father cut big bunches of the double-blossomed purple and white lilacs for them. Perhaps they loved flowers like the rest of us.

The winter of 1942-43 was very cold, or so it seemed to me. I spent long hours outside with Fritz Blankenburg digging up frozen patches of ground that had never been cultivated before. We had been ordered to utilize all arable acreage for the production of food. It was strenuous work, requiring the excavation of a one-meter deep channel, to ensure that the soil that ended up topmost was the layer that had been the lowest originally. (The German term for this procedure is rigolen).

Allied planes frequently flew over Ahlem on their way to nearby Continental, the big (synthetic?) rubber factory. The one-storied house in which we lived had no air raid shelter, and so, to the accompaniment of sporadic flak, we ran some distance across the yard to the shelter. Lotte rarely came to the shelter with us, and it was then Mania worried about her absence. While I was not afraid of a possible bombardment, we were extremely anxious if father wasn't home yet. Once, on his way from town, he was caught in a raid. He told us how he had run from shelter to shelter. The police would chase him into a shelter because no one was allowed to be on the street, but when the shelter's occupants saw the yellow Jewish star on his coat, they chased him out. According to the regulations, Jews and Aryans were forbidden to occupy the same shelter. This routine was repeated several times until he finally arrived, totally exhausted, in Ahlem.

Because we worked on the land, we did not lack either vegetables or fruit, and Mania even managed to preserve some of this produce for winter. She was an exceptionally capable cook and baker who made imaginative use of what little foodstuffs she had. I can still see her firm motions as she scrapes the bowl clean in which she has mixed some dough. This, she always reminded me, not only utilizes the precious ingredients but helps to make a better product. However, we had no eggs, milk or butter. When we were still at home in the Lützowstrasse building, a Frau Nyszli had come to see father in the office to ask for some advice. She was the non-Jewish wife of a Hungarian Jew who was at that time still in Hungary. She had a young son named Geza. This woman now visited us occasionally in Ahlem. She brought us some news of the outside world, and, perhaps more important, one or two eggs or a small piece of butter or margarine. Clearly she put herself and her child at some risk by helping us. In return father and Mania would give her a piece of porcelain, some coins or linens or whatever else she accepted in return. When we were about to be deported, we left our very few remaining small valuables with her.

In the spring of 1943 father asked me to come with him to the offices of the Gestapo in the Schlägerstrasse. I was to plant tomatoes on their balcony in boxes usually

used for geraniums and other flowers.⁶ We packed tomato plants, some radish seeds, soil and small tools. When we arrived I was shown the balcony and began my work. Father came outside to help me water the new plantings. Just as I was finished and we were about to return to the office, we heard awful screaming; the screams seemed to come from another floor of the building. As we were leaving, I was amazed to see that, next to me, father was walking *backwards* out of the room, facing the Gestapo official who sat at his desk, until we closed the door behind us. Back on the street we had a long walk ahead of us since we were not allowed to use public transportation. I breathed a sigh of relief. I did not dare ask father about his strange mode of exit. But I asked him if he knew whose screams we had heard. Father answered with uncommon openness: he thought that Polish slave laborers were being beaten on the floor above. (In our final two years in Hanover, Bremer and Nonne were mentioned most often as the two Gestapo men involved in day-to-day dealings with the Jewish community while in earlier years, it was usually Heinrichsmeier.)

A short time before another small transport of Jews left Ahlem. We were unaware that its destination was Auschwitz -- but even if we had known, the name would have meant little or nothing to us. The only persons we knew among those to be deported were Lotte's friend Helmut Bloch and his mother, and Oskar Windmüller and his parents. Plainly Lotte was extremely agitated, but she would not confide in or even speak to any one. She could not sit still, and in total silence she took to pacing the floor from one end of the apartment to the other. For days after the transport Lotte remained like a wordless stranger in our midst, unwilling or unable to acknowledge our concern or even our presence.

The development father had predicted for me finally began. While I stayed very skinny, I was very happy when at fifteen I menstruated for the first time. I had caught up with Eva! My stepmother now considered me mature enough to be able to make up a bed correctly - having told me for a year that it was a sign of my immaturity that I was doing it wrong. Even though Lotte's boyfriend had been deported, I continued to carry my crush for him, and I steeped myself in Heine's ironic poems. For months I made a valiant effort to win Lotte's affection, but I cannot recall a single instance of acknowledgment for my pains. As an only child she was not used to dealing with siblings. Or she simply had no use for me.

In anticipation of the deportation that we knew was ahead of us, I often tried to imagine what the places were like to which the members of our community had been shipped, and where we also would have to go. Occasionally a card would arrive from somewhere in Poland with a few pencilled words on it. But these cards were so obviously dictated to the writer, they said nothing - or everything. The appearance of

⁶ In testimony after the war against one of the Gestapo officials, Helmut Bloch says that he had to plant tomatoes on the Gestapo's balcony. By the time it was requested of me, he had been deported to Auschwitz.

such a card, months after it had been written gave us no reassurance, and there was no way of knowing whether the writer was still alive by the time that card arrived.

One day early in June father came out to us in the field where we were planting cabbage. He asked us to come indoors with him. Back in the apartment we found several Gestapo men waiting for us. "You are under arrest," they told us. Then we were transported to a jail in Hanover. Orders had been received from Berlin to deport the remnants of the Reichsvereinigung der Juden in Deutschland, the last official German Jewish organization. Father was its last official in Hanover. Some Jewish men with Christian spouses, like the lawyer, Dr. Horst Berkowitz, seem to have been appointed to be "spokesmen" either just before or after we left. Dr. Berkowitz had been severely disabled in World War I, but this did not help him save his family. His brother, our last choral leader and Grete's piano teacher, was sent to Riga with his wife and small daughter. Their elderly mother perished in Theresienstadt.

We four women spent two weeks in one small room in the local jail. It included a wash basin and a bucket on which we learned to relieve ourselves. During that time father and Mania were once or twice taken back to Ahlem where, watched by the Gestapo, they were allowed to pack. Mania brought us back some books to read. One, a book about Palestine at the turn of the century, had beautiful photographs of the land and its people. Its heroine, Rachel, a Russian Jewish student, was one of the first women pioneers. While she suffered many severe deprivations, these were temporary. At least her life had a purpose and her sufferings were not inflicted by an implacable and inscrutable enemy. But her story showed us that it was possible to live, surrounded by enemies, under the most primitive conditions.

While we were in prison, we met another prisoner: a young woman, a Miss Ferche, who was half-Jewish (Mischling) and had been jailed for the crime of miscegenation (Rassenschande). She told us that she had an indefinite sentence. She longed, she said, to be with us Jews.

Theresienstadt

On June 30, 1943, after two weeks in one of Hannover's prisons (possibly the Gerichtsgefängnis), we were brought to a small railroad station and put into a freight train. Father told us that we had been imprisoned because the Gestapo thought that he might flee. Nothing could have been further from his capability or intent. Perhaps a single, unattached man could disappear from Ahlem - if he had the means and the luck, as the physician, Dr. Hans Meyer seems to have succeeded in doing. A family of five could not. Father was not about to leave us at the worst moment of our life. He had managed to bring Eva and me back from Holland, and he was determined to keep us together. I sensed that he had suffered as much by our separation as Eva and I.

We knew that we were being deported to Theresienstadt although I do not know who told us. Aside from our own family, there were Fritz and Edgar Baum, a young, deaf-dumb Jewish couple who were dental technicians. Up to now they had been exempted from deportation because of their exceptional skill in fashioning prostheses for soldiers who were coming back from the Eastern front with severely wounded or frostbitten faces. There was Ingeborg Ferche, the young woman whom we had met in prison. She had been released for deportation, possibly because, at her request, father interceded for her. (She survived the war - not least because Dr. Leo Baeck, who was very influential in the final year of Theresienstadt's existence, protected "Mischlinge" - offspring of mixed marriages - from further deportation. Evidently for Dr. Baeck, as for so many of his Jewish compatriots, "the law was the law.") The ninth person was Frau Regina Engel, the 74-year old Hungarian woman whom we girls had met at our Ohsestrasse seder. Father seems to have felt a deep respect for her, perhaps even a filial affection. As far as I know, the freight car in which we were being deported was not hooked up to any other transport.

Lotte did not feel well on the trip. Shaken by fierce retching she stuck her head through the slightly ajar sliding door of the freight car. (This picture stored in my memory puzzles me. Did the Gestapo leave that door only partially secured? Our group of nine people were in this one freight car.) When she reappeared her face was white. But when we asked her how she felt she only shook her head. We were too preoccupied with our own anxiety and fear to ask why Lotte, a healthy, sturdy girl who always seemed so calm, should be the one among us who was feeling so ill.

Even if we could have done so, we had no wish to watch the passing scenery. The trip took more than a day, but if we had become apathetic since leaving Ahlem, our ominously hostile reception by Czech Jewish Ghetto workers quickly shook us awake. I could only wonder what awaited us here. Rudely, first we, then our baggage, were searched; without ceremony, things were taken out of our rucksacks and "confiscated." From now on, it was immediately clear, father and we would be lowly inhabitants of this place - in contrast to what I had seen as a somewhat special position which he, and we because of him, occupied in Hanover.

When these Ghetto workers had finally finished with us we were walked into the Ghetto. We were put up in the attic of one of the many small houses, set in an enclosed court yard. Exhausted, our family dropped down in a corner by a small mansard window, and the other people of our transport also found space for themselves. After a day or so, we tried to fix up the space assigned to us, cleaned the splintering and dirty wooden floor planks, and hung up a sheet which we used intermittently to close off our corner to give us some privacy. We had brought some of the tins of vegetables and fruit that Mania had managed to conserve the summer before. She also had brought a bag of "Einbrenne", (roux), flour that had been mixed with margarine and then roasted in a pan.

Occasionally, when I was hungry and there was no one around, I would take a pinch with my fingers and hold it in my mouth as long as I could before swallowing it. Mania did not seem to notice that it was getting less - probably because there was no opportunity to use it. In addition to those tins, we had a rucksack of clothes each and some bed linens. These were our earthly possessions.

A short time after we got to the Ghetto, Vati quietly told Eva and me the reason for Lotte's sickness during our trip: Lotte was expecting a baby. She was such a tall, well-built girl that no one had even suspected that she might be pregnant. The only rebuke - and it sounded more like regret - I heard from father was that she had not confided in her mother or him. He gave Lotte to understand that if she and Helmut Bloch, the young gardener whom she first met on Dec. 11, 1941, her sixteenth and his nineteenth birthday, had been married, he might have been able to come to Theresienstadt with her. Perhaps Lotte did not want to be married to him - what is certain is that she had not known how to confide in her mother or Vati. Always quiet and self-contained, she had seemed to accept, stoically and without protest, the events if not the demands of her environment. This was true not only in Ahlem, it was equally true here in Theresienstadt. For a while Mania wrung her hands in almost mute despair. Father tried to calm her by pointing out the futility of her agonizing: there was nothing any one could do. Eva and I discussed with each other what we could do to help Lotte. We decided to share with her the yeast bun that was parcelled out to the younger children once a week. At seventeen Lotte was too old to be eligible for it. When we came back to the attic after having stood in line to be handed our buns, we placed the two rectangular pastries end to end, and measuring carefully, sliced off one third of each. Lotte graciously accepted this homage to her condition from us. The daily portion of soup, or a steamed yeast dumpling with a green dill sauce, or a "Buchtel" (yeast bun) with an Ersatz coffee sauce in which small particles of margarine floated, and a ration of bread with some inedible jam, made from indefinable roots, were wholly inadequate for young and old alike and especially for a pregnant young woman.

Shortly after we came to Theresienstadt, father located Dr. Schleisner, the last head of our community in Hanover. He found him ill in bed. Dr. Schleisner told him that for the first time in many years he had been able to indulge an old hobby: bricklaying. Here in Theresienstadt he got his chance and more. Not surprisingly, Dr. Schleisner, a lawyer by profession, who was used neither to such hard physical labor nor to the unhygienic conditions, caught pneumonia. Father brought him a tin of Mania's precious conserved fruit and promised to return. Before father could keep his promise, Dr. Schleisner had died.

We had hardly "settled" into our attic corner when the Ghetto police came to search our meager possessions. They told us that they were acting on someone's information that we had brought food or other items with us that did not belong to us. When the Ghetto police had finished going through our things, they left with something that sounded almost like an apology: they had not found anything special and judged what we had brought to be our belongings. While we never found out who it was that had complained about us, it was our first lesson in how quickly the behavior of human beings could change under conditions of extreme stress and scarcity such as we were now experiencing.

In a small shed in the court yard of our house lived two young agricultural laborers who came from the southeastern region of Slovakia, bordering on Hungary, where Hungarian was also spoken. Father did his best to befriend them and liked speaking Hungarian again. It embarrassed me when I heard him sing for them - although they seemed to enjoy it. Then I fell ill with acute dysentery, and we had no medication.

Father asked the two young men for help. They gave him a precious commodity, a small green apple, and some blueberry tea. Mania grated the apple for me and brewed the tea. Whether or not it was due to these simple remedies, I recovered.

Mania became very silent. I thought there was reproach in her voice when she spoke to father - as if she was disappointed that he had been unable to protect her from this misery... But her persistent feeling of malaise must have been aggravated by her worry for Lotte. Mania also had the misfortune of bleeding every two weeks, while Eva and I stopped menstruating altogether immediately after our arrival. These two patterns, we were told, were common, if not the norm, in Theresienstadt. The only exception to this rule were women who because of their privileged situation had better, or simply more, food.

It was the beginning of October 1943 when Lotte gave birth to a boy.¹ She called him Daniel, which was a popular name for boys born in the Ghetto. When I visited her in the hospital, she asked me to bring the news to a new girlfriend of hers. Although they had taken a walk together the day before Daniel's birth, this friend was unaware that Lotte was expecting a baby! It took me a while to convince her that my story was true. Father built a little buggy for Danny. He enjoyed being with the blond, blue-eyed infant. Perhaps it reminded him of the time when we were little and he took care of us. I myself was suddenly reminded of my little Abrammetje. There he was, toddling toward me, dark eyes shining and wispy dark brown hair sticking up every which way on his head. Danny was quite frail at first. As a newborn he had jaundice and his circumcision was delayed for a short time. Mania must have been fearing what was in store for him and us, for she could barely conceal her wish that he not survive those early weeks.

Even before Danny's birth Eva and I were moved to the Jugendheim (youth home) for German Jewish girls. Czech girls (and boys) lived in another residence next door. The Austrian girls lived either with the Czechs or with us. Why we should have been segregated in this way I do not know. The Ghetto leaders tried to impose some structure on our lives. But they struggled with intractable conditions, and our new surroundings were only a slight improvement over the attic in which we had lived with our family. Lotte now lived with other young mothers and their infants. The wooden bunk beds on which we slept were infested with bed bugs, round, blood-thirsty vermin that had a terribly nasty odor when we hunted them down and killed them. It was considered "good" for us to be with other youngsters our age, but it reminded me immediately of our earlier separation from Vati when we were in Holland, and as often as I could, I went back to our family in the attic.

We were assigned to a group of kids who were sent outside the Ghetto to work in the vegetable gardens. Occasionally we tried to bring some vegetables for Danny into the Ghetto. But one day we were searched and caught with spinach hidden in our clothes. We were petrified when we were pulled out of the line of returning children. In Czech, the gendarmes screamed at us. We had no idea what they were saying, we only knew that we had lost our precious spinach. Czech girls later told us that we had been threatened with arrest. But they let us get back in line. (Some of the Czech gendarmes were known to be quite sympathetic, especially towards their compatriots.)

Most of the leaders of the youth homes were staunch Zionists, and they organized all kinds of lessons for us although this was clearly against the rules of the SS Commandant. We were taught biology by a young Czech physician, and I became very

¹ The Terezin Initiative Foundation confirmed that Danny was born October 2, 1943.

interested in the subject. Walter Freund - he let us call him by his first name - was gentle and courteous, and he was in charge of the health needs of our group home. He, his wife and infant son had a room in the same house, and when we needed attention he was never far. I even did not mind when I got a bout of bronchitis, although I was reluctant to submit to an examination. At 15 I was extremely skinny and Walter diagnosed me as being "pretubercular." That diagnosis entitled me to an occasional minute portion of a sardine-like fish.

There was a striking difference between the Ghetto life of the German and Austrian Jews and that of the Czechs. By and large the Czech Jews were young. They adjusted much better to their imprisonment than either of the other groups. Knowing the language of the country enabled them to find the occasional Czech gendarme or other non-Jew who was willing, for some payment or because he was decent, to risk his life to help with some provisions or even mail intended for the outside world. The Czechs were resourceful, and they occupied the positions that gave them access to the food stocks of the Ghetto. We were impressed by how many of them had the practical skills to shape their temporary environment into a more livable space. They made bunk beds and shelving to utilize the tiny space everyone had, regardless of whether they lived in the large garrisons or in small houses. But for the majority of Czech Jews, as for the other nationalities except possibly the Danish Jews, Theresienstadt was to be no more than a way-station to Auschwitz and other extermination camps further east. Later when I was in Birkenau, I heard that Walter Freund and his young family had also been deported.

The German and many of the Austrian Jews were mostly very old or disabled veterans of the First World War. Many were sick. They looked back into their past lives with regret and pain and mourned their immense losses. Some denied their disillusionment with the German nation's actions toward them while others were still engaged in finding excuses for what had happened to the Jews. This further incapacitated them and made their daily struggle to survive even more difficult. Many lost their will to live or their ability to care for themselves. To make matters worse, regardless of their former occupations and skills they were almost invariably assigned the most menial and even demeaning tasks. If they had advocates or "protection", it must, with few exceptions, have been quite ineffective. Nevertheless these old people attempted to uphold a certain dignity, a way of being that was deeply ingrained in them. They would not have been able to shed it. This too came at a cost. Already weakened by the terrible conditions and the extremely inadequate nutrition, the old people got even fewer calories than working people. This was a calculated decision by the Ghetto Elders to which not all of the Ghetto's inhabitants agreed, and which may eventually have been revoked. Thus there was not the remotest chance that such individuals could or would want to learn to fight for themselves or to seek work more suited to their age or station. They were recruited to clean and watch toilets. (Toilet watchers were employed to uphold a minimum of hygiene and cleanliness.) Death was rampant among these old people.

I seem to have noticed these things then because I was more an observer of the scenes around me than a feeling person. I was in danger of slipping back into an earlier, childish state in which I relied on Eva to ask all questions, a state that was to become even more pronounced later.

The attitudes of many German Jews such as insisting on their continued pride to have served their - ungrateful - fatherland well, did not endear them to the average Czech Jews or those in charge of the Ghetto administration. Having been lured into believing

that they were being sent to old age homes, many German Jews continued to deny the terrible realities confronting them. They put the blame for conditions in the Ghetto on its Jewish "self-administration" rather than where it ultimately belonged: on the Nazis. In Prague the Nazis had told the Czech Jews that this Ghetto was being especially established for them - but in Germany the old Jews were fooled into believing that Theresienstadt would be a comfortable Altersheim (old age home) for them.

After a while father found a place in one of the attics where he could serve as cantor at sabbath services. I do not recall ever attending such a service myself. Father seemed to have "adjusted." He changed with his drastically changed circumstances. He became quieter and no longer exerted control over every aspect of our lives. Sometime I thought that he felt a sense of relief. Perhaps he was glad to have lost the dubious "authority" he had held in Hanover. At the same time it was painful to see him so changed and stripped of the effectiveness and strength we associated with him and on which all of us had always relied.

The Ghetto was a revelation to me. I saw the gulf that separated us from the Czech Jews regardless of when these had arrived in the Ghetto, because even late arrivals found their way quickly, sharing the language and finding friends and relatives to help them. Few German Jews had "connections," "protection," or skills at "organizing" (called Schleusen). To lack these advantages and skills was a handicap we could not overcome.

One day, Mania told us that father had been called to the German Kommandantur (headquarters). A Gestapo official from Hanover had arrived in Theresienstadt and requested to see father. (A visit by a Gestapo man called Butterbrodt from Hanover has been documented. We do not know if this was the occasion or what its purpose was.) This man asked father to return with him, ostensibly for the purpose of preparing lists of Jews who had emigrated to America. The Gestapo wished to be ready for the eventual conquest of America and, with it, its Jews. Father, of whose exceptionally good memory they may have been aware, was to help in this work. (Possibly this event dates to the time after the first major bombardment of Hanover in October 1943 when the Gestapo headquarters and with it a large part of their archives were destroyed.) While it is now ludicrous to think that the Nazis could have made such plans, it was not improbable then. There is no way of knowing whether our deportation in May 1944 was the result of his refusal to cooperate. I do not know how father phrased his response. According to Mania, he told the Gestapo official that he would not go back without us. He pleaded not to be separated from us and was "allowed" to resume his Ghetto existence.

What little food we had brought was long since gone. There were people who could actually afford to exchange bread for toys and other luxuries. Eva knitted several sweaters with wool she was given, and I made stuffed toy elephants, using scraps of red-dotted white oil-cloth. The bread we earned with these activities we proudly took to father and Mania to share with them.

While there was little food for people like us in the Ghetto, there was music: in the youth home we learned a canon of which I can still sing the final line: Dona nobis pacem (Give us peace). Operas were performed and string quartets played. Eva and I attended concert versions of "Tosca" and the "Magic Flute" in one of the big garrisons and, in a different location, we heard Haydn's "Seasons." To my surprise I learned that I

had long known two arias of the Magic Flute, In diesen heil'gen Hallen kennt man die Rache nicht" (Vengeance is unknown in these hallowed halls), and "Oh Isis und Osiris" which father had sung many years before. The room into which we squeezed with the other standees to hear the Mozart opera was so overcrowded and stuffy that I had to go outside for air because I was about to faint.

Theresienstadt had its own fashions. Many young girls wore their hair as short as boys, and I had mine cut the same way. I did not know that this kind of cut had originally been mandated by the Ghetto authorities. Somewhere - I think still in Hanover - I had got hold of an olive green knitted (Bleyle) suit with short pants. These I wore all the time. One day father and I were walking together when he met one of his new acquaintances. This man exclaimed in surprise: "I had no idea you had such a handsome young son." Father thought this funnier than I. Another time when Eva and I stood in line to enter the public baths, the guard was about to refuse me entrance to the women's section. My face must have turned crimson, and he let me in.

Life in the Ghetto was a pretence at normalcy, its reality often too terrible to bear. Many rumors and stories made the rounds, but regardless of their content or purpose, their ending invariably was punishment and death. One day, in the fall of 1943, the Germans marched every last person, regardless of their condition, out of the Ghetto onto a large field. We spent a whole day "camping" on that field. We did not have the slightest idea whether we were going to be alive by nightfall. This action allegedly took place to conduct a census because a few young men had escaped from the Ghetto. There must have been fifty thousand people on that field. As far as we could see, human beings were congregating in tight clusters; the adults visibly anxious, and afraid to be separated from their children; old people huddled under blankets if they were lucky enough to have brought them; everyone hungry and thirsty, and the younger children, despite the general misery and commotion, skipping about. Night had fallen by the time we were allowed to return. We had hours of struggle to get back because everyone had to enter through one gate. There was a terrible commotion and people panicked. When we finally entered the Ghetto exhausted but relieved, it almost seemed home to us. The next day we heard that some old people had been trampled to death in the stampede.

One day we saw a large contingent of Jewish children arriving. We were forbidden to go near them, but it was quickly known that they were from Bialystok. They were brought to an isolated building and no one, except for a group of nurses, among whom was a sister of Kafka, and physicians who volunteered to take care of them, were allowed to mix with them. The children were starved, dressed in rags and full of vermin. When they were led to be cleaned up in the bath house, they resisted with all their strength, crying: "No, please, no gas." They had to be forced into the showers. The people who took care of them could not - or would not - understand the meaning of their fear. It was said that these twelve hundred or so children were to be exchanged for German prisoners of war. We thought: How lucky they are! For a moment I was reminded that there was a war on. Since coming to Theresienstadt the needs and experiences of our day-to-day existence had wiped away all thought of the world outside for me. I had long since stopped wondering about the progress of the war or its possible outcome. But the real fate of these children was to be quite different. Much later a few details of their story emerged: These children, who had witnessed the deaths of their parents in the Bialystok Ghetto, a center of Jewish resistance, were eventually sent to Birkenau together with their caretakers, and killed.

That was how we clung to false hope, refusing to acknowledge the evidence that was before our eyes because it was nothing less than a portent of the evil that was still in store for us. Many of us preferred to fabricate, or least believe, a constant stream of reassuring rumors. Nevertheless, originally a plan may have existed to exchange the children - or they would not have been saved at the time of the murder of their parents.

Less than a year after our arrival in Theresienstadt father was notified that we were scheduled to be deported.² Although it was probably not made explicit, I believe that there was no doubt that we were being sent to Auschwitz. Lotte, whose little Daniel was now a toddler with blond curly hair, was not included in the transport. Father thought it would be better for her to stay in Theresienstadt with Danny and advised her not to volunteer for inclusion in our transport. She had come to know a young Czech baker, and both father and Mania thought well of him. Father went to see him to ask that he take good care of her and Danny. Then he told Eva and me to come for a walk with him.

We went to the Magdeburger Kaserne (the garrison in which the Jewish administration had their rooms) to see Rabbi Leo Baeck. Father told us that he was going to ask Rabbi Baeck, the spiritual leader of the Ghetto, to help prevent or postpone our impending deportation. He did this, I assume, on the strength of his former position in the Jewish community of Hanover. Father asked us to wait for him in front of the house. It seemed to me that he did not want to use Eva and me to gain the sympathy from Rabbi Baeck that might have helped to sway him in our favor. And, ever protective of us, neither did he want us to witness Rabbi Baeck's possible refusal. Their conversation must have been very brief. In no time at all father came downstairs. Rabbi Baeck had denied his request. Father took our hands and told us we were going back to the attic to pack our rucksacks.

Did Rabbi Baeck deny father's request on principle? Was he powerless to prevent our deportation? I have since learned that he did grant such requests to some individuals, and automatically to offspring of mixed marriages. Since then, whenever I hear Rabbi Baeck's name or see it in print, I am reminded of my father's request and Rabbi Baeck's response.

Not more than a day or two later we had to assemble on a railway platform that had been extended to reach the entrance of the Ghetto, making deportations that much easier. There was a large crowd and a lot of agitation. Three transports totalling 7,500, mostly elderly Jews, were being sent away.³

² Later I learned that the May 1944 transports, on which 7,500 Ghetto inhabitants were deported to the Birkenau family camp, were meant to make Theresienstadt appear less crowded to prepare for the inspection by the International Red Cross. Preparations for that inspection had been going on for months.

³ According to the Kalendarium der Ereignisse im Konzentrationslager Auschwitz-Birkenau 1939-1945 (Calendar of Events etc.), we were among 2,503 Jews arriving on May 16, 1944. Only 707 were men. The archive of the State Museum Auschwitz lists actual names.

Now there were only four of us. I do not remember saying good-bye to Lotte and Danny. Between eighty and one hundred men and women and children were pushed, carried, and loaded into our freight car. Only a few seemed to have the strength to want to resist. Each of us had a rucksack, suitcase or other bundle. A small pail was handed to us - it was meant to serve our toilet needs. No one wanted to stand or sit next to it. The sliding door was pulled shut and bolted. It was almost totally dark inside. Although it was early morning, I felt exhausted. To sit down was to risk being trampled on. I tried to lean against Vati, but it was Eva and she complained. It was difficult to distinguish anything. A few rays of light came through a narrow strip just below the roof. Father told us to try to remain calm, complaining would only make us feel worse.

Now I truly knew what it was like to be "abgeschoben" (deported). Theresienstadt had only been the beginning. And although that journey - a wholly inappropriate term - was filled with fear and foreboding, I could not picture what was in store for us. I thought it took several days - but since we left on the morning of the 15th and arrived when it was dark on the 16th, it must have taken two days and one night. One moment was memorable: over the din and wailing we heard the moans of a man. Raising his own voice, father called for quiet and asked what was wrong. The answer came back that the man was having trouble with his hernia. He was in great pain. Father, who himself had a double hernia, knew that pain and how to relieve it. He fastened his belt to a hook he found on the ceiling of the freight car and used it to swing himself over the bodies of the other people to get to the suffering man. He massaged the man's abdomen and that helped him. After staying by his side for a while he returned to his spot next to us.

It was night when our transport came to a halt in Birkenau.

Birkenau

We hear the sound of loud voices outside and dogs barking. Someone is working to unbolt the door of our freight car. A voice commands: "Raus, schnell." (Get out, fast). In the dark, awkwardly stumbling over strangely unresisting limbs, we find our way to the outside. Only when my feet touch solid ground, do I realize that those limbs must have belonged to someone who died during our journey. They sat or lay right next to us, but in the darkness we did not notice that they were dying. On the ramp we are met by shadowy figures in loose, striped pajama-like clothes. They move among us. SS Guards shout: "Hurry. Get moving." People hesitate. They remember that they have left their rucksacks and other belongings behind. Someone loudly assures us that these will be delivered to us, "later." It is the least of our worries. Father, Mania, Eva and I merge with an untidy column of men, women and children straggling in the direction of blinding flood lights. I am sure those lights will kill us once we get close to them. But the prisoners who keep urging us to move toward the lights say that we are headed for a camp. In much lower tones, I hear them ask for our rings and watches. They promise to keep them safe for us and to return everything "tomorrow." Our family has nothing left to give them. Whenever one of the armed guards comes near, the prisoners fall silent.

Driven on by prisoners and guards, our procession finally reaches its destination. It is called the family camp, but here it is too dark to see anything. The men are told to go to the left. Father disappears with them. Women and children are to go to the right. We are shown into a barrack. Since the lower levels of the bunks are occupied, Mania, Eva and I climb to the top of a three-tiered bunk, and totally exhausted, we try to find a little space next to the two women who already lie there. The wooden boards are covered with a sack of straw. The two women hardly stir when we try to find some space next to them. The next morning when I go outside the barrack, I see that we are in a rectangular enclosure, a barren, gray strip of ground with a center "walk" with barracks on either side. The whole area is enclosed by barbed wire. Soon we are ordered to stand in line. Someone tells us that we are to be tattooed. Eva, in front of me, cries out in pain when the needle penetrates the skin of her arm. I feel almost nothing. Our numbers are in sequence: Mania, A-2703, Eva, A-2704, and I, A-2705.

Shortly after our arrival, one of the women in charge of our barrack asks if there are any twins among us. Eva and I step forward and are immediately taken to another barrack. This separates us from our stepmother. The new barrack is in no way different from the first one. Not everyone there is a twin. Father finally finds us. His tattoo is A-253. Someone must have taken one of his shoes. Instead he has wound a piece of cloth around his foot. His belt is gone, and he holds up his trousers with a piece of string. Worse still, his head has been shaved. He looks so strange that it takes a little while to realize that he is our father. . . His face looks drawn and deep folds run from his nose to his chin. But he listens patiently to our repeated questions: "Vati, where are we? What is this place?" He reminds us that this is only the first day. Things "will improve" once we "settle down." "Der liebe Gott wird schon helfen" or "mit Gottes Hilfe" he assures us. (The dear Lord will provide; with God's help.) Although father has always used these expressions when he hoped to comfort and reassure us, it seems to me that father really believes this.

Soon father assigns himself a job: with a shovel he has found somewhere, he pretends to scrape and clean the ground in front of our barrack. No one questions him, and he is able to stay near us. Then he discovers that the washroom is for both men and women, who strip without apparent shame to wash in the stinking, rusty brown water. When we tell

father that we also have gone there to wash, he brings us water in a dish. He wants us to wash ourselves in the barrack instead.

The prisoners who were incarcerated in the family camp when we got there are mostly young Czech Jews who were deported from Theresienstadt at the end of December 1943, about five months earlier. During the early morning roll call, they treat us with extreme harshness. They shout orders and slap those who are too slow or confused to obey. Since so many on our transport are elderly women, they simply do not understand what they are being ordered to do. If German guards approach, our tormentors spring to attention. They are obviously fearful themselves. This does not stop us from fearing them, but Eva and I tell each other that these Jewish prisoners must have been brutalized here. One of the younger Czech women from our transport manages to speak to the Block Älteste (barrack elder) whom she has known in Theresienstadt. Her story surpasses our worst imaginings:

When she arrived in Birkenau, an earlier group of Jews deported from Theresienstadt had been in the family camp for almost six months. To make room for the new arrivals, everyone of the original group was gassed. The new group "simply" supplanted the old. There was no selection; no one was spared and given a chance to work. "Because of your arrival," the Block Älteste said accusingly, her face contorted by something we are only beginning to grasp, "it is now our turn to end up in those chimneys." Their own six months are almost up. She did not care if her friend believed her. She was certain that our arrival in the family camp doomed her to the same fate as the first group of prisoners from Theresienstadt.

We had the same jailers, and not one of us had chosen to come to this place, but we were irredeemably divided into "them" and "us." At the very least, these young Czechs' expectation of imminent death and their hatred of us had to be welcomed by our guards. While it was their superiors and not the lowly guards who had devised this scheme to limit the population of the camp, it made controlling us that much easier. Part and parcel of the vaunted "preferential treatment" of the Jews of Theresienstadt, it was our initiation into the real purpose of Birkenau: the eventual extermination of all those brought here.

The many old people of our transport suffered the most. Some never got up again from their bunks. Women whom I saw alive when I left the barrack were corpses when I returned an hour later. This happened so often that I was soon able to tell when a woman was near death. I had seen death in Theresienstadt, but here in Birkenau Eva and I were surrounded by it. Even so, I thought that these old women were much better off dead. Some of the women were too weak to find (or fight for) space on any bunk and lay on the brick elevation in the center of the barrack (the Kamin). One day, while we were waiting in line for our daily portion of soup, I saw the woman in front of me dip her finger into her wet metal soup dish to drop water into the open mouth of an old woman lying on the Kamin alongside which we were standing. The old woman's breath came and went in irregular gasps. She had only moments left to live. I asked the woman to stop giving her water. "Couldn't she see that she was only prolonging the old woman's agony?" Surprised, she turned to me. But she stopped. I had never reacted so vocally and decisively. Then I wondered what made me so sure.

Within days of our arrival we found out why we had been singled out as twins. Dr. Joseph Mengele, the camp's Nazi physician who conducted many of the selections, was interested in twin "research." We were sent to the Revier (sick bay) where a physician-prisoner weighed and measured us and recorded all data relating to our lives and physiques. He took note of minute variations in our skin color and took blood tests on several occasions. The young Czech woman prisoner who was the clerk of our barrack had instructions to give us an extra helping of soup. This was the standard rule for twins. When Eva and I looked at the woman a little more closely we noticed that she was pregnant. We thought we detected both kindness and concern in her slightly freckled face.

Father tried to meet with us after he got his soup, because once in a while he found a lump in it which he thought might be meat. He would fish it out and give it to us. In Ahlem when Mania persuaded him to allow her to use non-kosher meat if she could obtain it, he refused to touch any food that might have been prepared with meat or had even a drop of sauce on it. And he became very upset if he thought that Mania tried to serve it to him in some hidden form anyway. Later we were told that those whitish lumps we were finding in the soup were bromide.¹ Concerned about the effects of the chemical, the "privileged" veterans among long time prisoners had not eaten that soup in years.

Within a short time I again got diarrhea. At night a bucket just inside the back entrance to the barrack served as the latrine. Next to that bucket corpses were stacked up. They accumulated much faster than they could be removed. Climbing down from the top of the three tiered bunk and squatting over the bucket next to those stacks of naked corpses was almost more than I could bear. It took all my will power. But I saw others helplessly soil themselves, and I was determined to stay clean. Again father tried to help me. He brought me a piece of white (!) bread for which he must have swapped his own ration of camp bread.

During the day we used a latrine for men and women. Two boards on opposite sides of the rectangular structure were the seats. There was no separation of the sexes except for the cesspool itself. We learned to relieve ourselves back to back, without actually sitting down and, as important, without turning around. A large part of the day was spent looking for a little cloth, or more rare still, a little paper, to clean ourselves with.

If there were trees in the camp, I did not see them. Not a blade of grass or weed seemed to have taken root anywhere. Dust and pebbles covered everything. The sun continued to shine, and the oppressive heat and stench of decomposing bodies reminded us that it was summer. Father wanted to take us on a "walk" around the various barracks. With little success, he tried to skirt the large piles of bizarrely eaglespread corpses. Eva and I tried to reassure him and told him not to worry about us. Again and again we encountered prisoners and kapos as they busily undressed the bodies and extracted gold teeth and crowns from mouths left gaping in death. I thought it was the spectacle of these activities from which father tried so hard to shield us. There were few places where we could walk. At another corner around which father led us we came upon prisoners who were supervised by a stick-swinging kapo. From what we could see, they were near exhaustion. They were lugging heavy stones back and forth. Except for the amusement it may have afforded the kapo, it was totally useless labor.

¹ I have been informed by Prof. Claus Füllberg-Stolberg of the University of Hanover that no evidence was ever found to confirm that an additive of bromide was used in prisoners' soup, or elsewhere.

I began to develop my own ways of protecting myself from what I saw: somehow I managed to persuade myself that these sights could not be true; they were "not real." I also occupied myself with adding numbers, those on our and other people's arms, birth dates, and whatever other strings of numbers occurred to me. I decided that some of the totals I derived from these "games" were "good omens." Another strategy was betting: if something could get done at a certain speed, or I managed to walk over a long ridge, or obstacle, "all would be well." These bets occurred to me in a flash, and I did not dwell on what might happen if I could not carry out my arbitrarily created "task" and lost my bet.

One day a van came to take us to the central camp of Auschwitz where long-time, political prisoners were held. They were called Ehrenhäftlinge, (roughly, privileged prisoners), and were mostly non-Jewish Poles. One of these, a young student, photographed the twins for Mengele. His blond hair had been allowed to grow, and his well pressed white shirt contrasted sharply with the look of the men we saw in the family camp. He spoke fluent German, and once we lost our apprehension, we talked quite freely with him. The young man gave us a present of a few cigarettes before we were taken back to Birkenau. When we told father about our trip and gave him the cigarettes, he anxiously admonished us "to be good." "Don't do anything for a little food. You would regret it later." We understood what he meant, and told him that these cigarettes were a real present.

Some of the prisoners had fewer scruples. The top tier of the bunk bed next to ours was occupied by a Czech mother and her two daughters. The older daughter's black hair was just beginning to grow back. She had been shaved when she was caught in some "illegal" activity. Her younger sister, who was at most eighteen, was an exceptionally beautiful girl with very pale skin and Titian-red hair. She was regularly visited by the most feared prisoner in the family camp, its chief kapo. Fischer, a middle-aged man, had the reputation of treating his fellow prisoners with absolute ruthlessness. We could see him from afar, pacing along the barbed wire that divided us from a camp of gypsies,² his large shaved head and upper body thrust forward, menacingly swinging his stick. Everyone was petrified when he came near, and we tried to stay out of his way. We were told that this kapo was a Czech Jew whose two sons the Nazis had hanged - in his presence. His own dehumanized behavior was said to be the result of that experience.³

One Friday night father climbed on the Kamin. He began to sing some of our familiar prayers of the Friday night service. The women in the barrack, sitting or lying on their bunks, fell silent. I was very proud of him - but minutes later my pride turned into embarrassment when after his service, father went around with a dish and asked for a

² Since I wrote this, a German historian has disputed my memory on the ground that the camp for Gypsies was not adjacent to the Family camp. But I saw gypsies in the camp next to ours, and the same has been reported by Ruth Elias in her memoir. While it probably was not the main Gypsy camp, it was occupied by some gypsies at that time.

³ Actually, according to H.G. Adler, the historian of Theresienstadt, Fischer was "the hangman" of Theresienstadt where he volunteered to hang 16 young Jews in January and February 1942 when the Ghetto elders were ordered to carry out the death sentences imposed by the SS. Adler makes no mention of any sons. This story tells me, if not Adler, that Fischer saved his fellow Czech Jews in Theresienstadt from an excruciating task. What would have happened to the whole Ghetto if they had refused the order of the SS Kommandant to hang these men who had committed trivial offenses? Fischer is said to have explained that he had worked in the Anatomical Institute in Prague and knew something of human physiology.

contribution of bread. Surprisingly he received several pieces. Then father offered these pieces of bread to Eva and me, but we refused to accept them. Although I knew that father desperately wanted to feed us and not himself, I felt terribly ashamed of him. He had fallen short of my image of him. I could not tell him - but father must have understood. It was painful to see him standing there with that dish in his hand - wondering what to do with those few pieces of bread.

There was one more time when we heard father sing. He had "met" a Hungarian who was a prisoner in the adjoining "A" camp for men. This man had a violin, and one Sunday afternoon when there were fewer guards around, he played some old Hungarian songs that father knew. With the barbed wire between them, father began to sing, and small audiences collected on either side of the electrified wire. While father was singing, Mania spoke in Polish to a man on the other side of the wire in the "A" camp. He complimented her on her still fluent Polish. Then he disappeared for a moment, and when he returned he handed her a whole loaf of bread! We were so glad that Eva and I told father and Mania that we did not know whether that Pole gave it to her because he liked father's Hungarian songs or because Mania had spoken Polish with him.

A camp where gypsies were held adjoined the family camp on its other flank. We could see men, women and children of all ages huddled together. Shortly after we came, during a succession of nights, the camp was emptied of all its prisoners. Day and night flames could be seen in the sky, rising high above the chimneys of the crematoria which could not contain them. They had gassed all the gypsies and were burning their bodies around the clock.

While there were always rumors, one story became more and more persistent: The end of the family camp was near. Like the gypsy camp, we too would be liquidated. But this time, those fit for work were to be selected first. There were several weeks during which Mania, Eva and I, but Eva ever more frantically, begged father to stand for selection when the time came. "Otherwise you will be gassed," she told him plainly, repeatedly. Often Eva and I would sit with father by the side of the barrack. That is when I noticed for the first time that father's ankles were swollen. I had no idea why that should be. I remembered those hernias I knew he had on both sides. Many years ago, mother had told me that these were the result of father carrying Grete's (or our?) baby carriage including its content up the two flights of stairs to our apartment. Father's hair was beginning to grow back. It was white. He now had a shoe for his right foot to replace the cloth he had used. His trousers were hanging in folds around his legs. It was unlikely that they would consider this sixty-one- year- old man fit for work. Father answered our entreaties with: "Seit doch keine Narren." (Don't be foolish) It was another favorite saying of his. And we had always known what he meant. Now I was not sure why he thought our pleas and assertions so foolish.

We came face to face with Mengele when he examined Eva and me to check the accuracy of the physical data recorded by the prisoner physician. I controlled every muscle in my body to be as calm as I could be, and Eva reacted similarly. But his tailored uniform and the cap he did not remove were the only reminders that he was no ordinary physician. He even made some small talk, commenting that my face was very deceiving: it was round although my body was very skinny. That was hardly news to me. All during my

childhood my siblings had teased me about my moon face. Now even Dr. Mengele had noticed. Long after this encounter, we realized how fortunate his indifference toward us had been. It meant that he took no interest in experimenting on us, a set of fraternal twins.

We knew that Mengele was in charge of the selections. With a wave of his hand, whistling some operatic aria, he decided who was to live, and who to die. After Mengele had examined us, Eva was beginning to hope that she might have a chance to ask him to spare our father and to assign him some "light work." She asked me to come with her and help her in this attempt to save our father. One day when we saw Dr. Mengele and his entourage leave one of the blocks, Eva thrust herself in front of him and burst out: "Please, Dr. Mengele, save my father." She was simply brushed aside. No one reacted to her request, but neither was she punished. I stood next to her and did not say a word. Ever after I was certain that she would always remember my failure to speak up. She had made an attempt to save father while I had remained silent.

Since our arrival in Birkenau I had been fearful and passive. I would not ask anyone for the simplest information or take any kind of initiative. Eva, despite her despair, routinely took the leading role in our existence. My fears persisted during our entire stay in camp and even beyond.

Beginning of July the first selection was held: Mania was chosen for work and immediately separated from us. For many days she was penned up with hundreds of women in one of the rooms of the "Sauna", and we could see her through a small window. It was the last time we saw her.⁴ Eva, who had become attached to Mania during our stay in Birkenau, was extremely upset by our parting. I remained silent and unmoved. I felt ashamed and guilty about my apparent indifference, but I could not react in any other way. I was beginning to think that I had no body at all, except a head with eyes. Although I took in everything, I moved about in an atmosphere of unreality, like a piece of wood.

In the family camp the only prisoners left were those who, like father, did not stand for selection either because they had "chosen" not to, or because they were too old and had not been called. Others were special cases or sets of twins. We spent the few days remaining to him with father, waiting anxiously for what was in store for us - but only Eva expressed what she felt. Bluntly, she spoke of her fear of what was going to happen to father, while neither he nor I, certain though I was, and he had to be, could admit that in a few days, he would be killed. When I looked at father, he appeared tranquil, without a spark of anger. He was intent only on trying to keep us calm, even consoled. He talked about the future and impressed on us to get in touch with Grete after the war. One day, without our asking for it, he gave us his Kennkarte, the German identity card with his picture and a large "J" stamped on it. I was certain then that he did not expect to live. Eva took the card, folded it and put it into the breast pocket of her blouse. Vati asked us to take care of each other, adding: "Seit schön brav." (Be good.)

We had been in the family camp for almost two months when on July 11th all the twins were called to come forward. It was another hot, cloudless day. Early in the morning we had to assemble at the entrance to the family camp. We were being moved to the women's camp, situated perpendicular to the family camp, across the railway ramp. Father stood there with us. Eva and I took turns embracing him. Then we had to march out of the family camp. On the road we kept turning back to try and get another glimpse

⁴ A registration document from the Stutthof concentration camp lists Mania's arrival on 20.7.1944. Reason for incarceration: Unknown(!)

of father. I could not see him very clearly. At fourteen, in a misbegotten fit of vanity, I had stopped wearing my glasses and promptly lost them. I begged Eva, who was much more nearsighted than I, to let me - just for a moment - look through hers. She refused. Very soon there was a bend in the road. That far-away figure who we thought was father had vanished.

In the women's camp Eva and I were assigned to a barrack in the "Riviera" (Revier). We spent the first two days trying to get as close as we could to the barbed wire that separated us from the railway ramp. On the other side of the rail lines was the family camp, and we thought we might be able to see Vati there. We never did.

On July 11th and 12th everyone of the family camp's elderly Jews was transported to the crematoria and killed. The suffering they endured and the horror of that death for those who, like father, knew what to expect, would be unimaginable had it not been described by those in charge of these operations. But long before I read some of those accounts, I had my own picture of father's last hours. It is still with me.

When we saw the flames in the sky, Eva and I were in despair. We stood crying on roll call, and wherever else we were sent. We took little notice of our new surroundings. Over and over Eva asserted that she did not want to go on living. She must have been deeply offended by my greater calm because she repeatedly accused me: "You don't care about father's death." I could only tell her that I did. Perhaps my old stubbornness reasserted itself, because something in me defiantly reminded me that I was alive. Unlike Eva, I wanted very much to go on living. I tried to persuade Eva that that was what father had expected of us - the only coherent thought I was able to express during those days and weeks. And while we were in camp my point of view prevailed. But whenever unusual difficulties arose - hardly an infrequent occurrence - she reiterated her wish that she would rather be dead. She had, at the age of sixteen, become convinced that death was preferable to unbearable pain. That conviction would remain with her for the rest of her life.

One evening when I was lying on my bunk, I found a piece of what I guessed was bacon under my straw sack. Eva and I shared it. It was the first time in our life we had eaten such food. The next evening we found another piece. Before long my stomach began to revolt and I was doubled up with pain. The next morning after roll call, I came back to my bunk to lie down and discovered who had been so generous toward us. A young Polish girl, the clerk of our barrack, must have observed our unhappiness. It was she who had slipped the bacon under our straw sack. The blond and blue-eyed Polish girl, possibly called Wanda, and I exchanged only a few words. In halting German she explained that she was receiving packages from her parents in Cracow. She was a Catholic student who, together with a younger sister, had been incarcerated because they were members of a resistance cell at their university.

A few days later Eva and I and other sets of twins were called before the female Nazi guard, possibly Mandel by name, who was in charge of the women's camp. A middle-aged, thin, buck-toothed woman, we knew her by her derisive laugh. She was never without her whip which she cracked against her riding boots. She looked at the row of twins that had been assembled before her. When she came to me, she looked at me from top to bottom and - laughed. I was still wearing the dark green short pants and shirt from Theresienstadt, the only clothes I had. Perhaps I looked funny to her. She gave orders

that I was to get a dress, probably from "Canada", the place where the arriving prisoners' luggage was unpacked and sorted for possible use in Germany. She had chosen me to be a Läuferin (running messenger). From then on, from early morning until evening, dressed in a black felt dress -- embroidered with Stiefmütterchen (pansies)-- I stood at the gate of the women's camp near the guard house and delivered messages from the guards at the gate, running from one end of the women's camp to the other. Very soon my shoes wore out and I ran barefoot, but I discovered that if I ran very fast, I hardly felt the pebbles on the camp street. I was so lightheaded my notion that I had no body seemed confirmed. It felt as if I were flying above the ground.

Eva was assigned a similar position inside the camp. She was stationed in the Schreibstube, the office of the Lagerälteste (camp elder). The Germans had intentionally chosen twins to do this work, because the prior Läuferin, Mala Zimetbaum, had managed, if only briefly, to escape with her Polish boyfriend, Edek Galinski. The story of Mala's extraordinary flight and recapture has been told by others. After she was recaptured we were ordered to line up outside to witness her punishment. Eva went, but I hid in the barrack. Eva later told me that the guards twisted Mala's arms until they came out of their sockets and broke. She endured her pain without uttering a sound. Finally she fainted. At that point they threw her inert body into a wheelbarrow and carted her off to the gas chambers.

One of the German guards - as many others, he was a Volksdeutscher from either Slovakia or the Ukraine - took me along when he went outside the women's camp to the central mess hall to get food for himself and his mates. Silently, firmly holding me by the hand, he walked with me down the road until we got to the hall crowded with Nazi guards who were noisily waiting in line for their turn to get their food. I felt acutely uneasy during that walk, and standing on line with a crowd of Nazi guards did nothing to lessen my discomfort. Relief came on the return trip because I was carrying the canteens in both hands. Occasionally, after they had finished their meal, the guards called me into the guardhouse and told me to scrape out the left-overs for myself. Long after my liberation I thought I could still taste that food.

Near the entrance of the camp a space was reserved for the orchestra. Every morning while the columns marched out of the camp to work, the musician-prisoners played. I think it was military music, even Sousa marches among them. Eva and I got to know Anita (Lasker), the cellist, who was a tall, good-looking girl with dark curly hair. Her older sister, Renate, usually was somewhere near the orchestra. She served as an interpreter and Läuferin. These two Jewish girls, who were deported from Breslau many months earlier, befriended us. Like us, they had an older sister in England whom they were hoping to see again. They understood what we were going through because they too had lost their parents. They seemed nevertheless to manage to keep up their courage. The members of the orchestra were among those prisoners who had special privileges. Their clothes were better and so was the barrack in which they were staying.

We were also getting to know several young girls from Slovakia who had been in this place for more than two years. They had to build Birkenau, the wooden barracks, the paths running between them, the primitive roads. They told us of their hunger and thirst and how they had lost their mothers and sisters to rampant diseases, experiences equalled only by the terrible cruelty of their guards. We thought we had become quite familiar with those conditions, but they repeatedly told us, their own experiences had been immeasurably worse. The numbers tattooed on their left arms, like ours, had four digits. But theirs were the very start of the count, ours a new series beginning with an "A". Sometimes this was pointed out to us, and there was nothing we could say to counter their fierce resentment. Originally there were about three thousand of these young Jewish

women and girls. Two and a half years later, in the summer of 1944, perhaps two hundred of the group were still alive. Most had positions of responsibility and privilege. At roll call or in the daily block routines, whenever they had to deal with large numbers of prisoners, their harshness could degenerate into plain physical cruelty. Eva and I never doubted that their survival was the result of their toughness and loyalty to each other. We were handicapped in our relations with them because German was the only language we had in common, a language that was useful but also hated. (Our ability to speak German must have been a point in our favor when, among a group of twins, we were chosen to be Läuferinnen.) So when we spoke with the Slovak girls, we always assured them that our parents had in fact been Hungarians - and to convince them we came up with the few Hungarian words and phrases we knew.

We knew what the differently colored triangles on prisoners' uniforms meant and, by looking at their numbers, could estimate how long they had been in Birkenau. While instinctively we were more cautious when we were confronted by a prisoner with a black or green triangle, which stood for different criminal offenses, we knew that red meant "political" and purple, "religious crimes". The latter were mostly Jehova's Witnesses, people whom we knew to be among the best Germans at that time. Some of the German political prisoners, such as Orli Reichert, the quite young woman who headed the Revier, seemed quite compassionate, at least to us. Others, looking at our numbers, would treat us with contempt and even hatred because we had been fortunate to arrive later than they.

It may have been sometime in August, about one month after we had lost father, when Eva told me that she was sure she had seen the kind, freckle-faced woman who served soup in our barrack in the family camp. Berta Reich was in the Revier where she and Ruth Elias, another Czech Jewish woman, had given birth to their babies. We went to see her, and she told us that they had been sent to another camp, near Hamburg, after the selection in the family camp. Mengele had not noticed that these two women were pregnant, but another prisoner in the camp in Germany had reported them and they were returned to Birkenau. They pretended not to be Jewish. But both "lost" their babies. Eva and I were given to understand even then that the death of Ruth Elias' girl, and Berta Reich's boy had not been due to "natural causes."⁵

Among men in a road gang, we recognized a young man who was one of the leaders in our youth home in Theresienstadt, and we managed to slip some bread to him. Both Eva and I had a knack for recognizing the faces of people we had seen only rarely or some time ago.

Another Polish girl befriended us. Halina, who told us that she was not Jewish, was in charge of the Krätzeblock, the barrack that housed the women who had scabies. The barrack actually had a shower stall, and she let us use it. She warned us not to touch its walls because we might become infected. As we walked through the barrack we saw the horrible suffering of these sick prisoners. The barrack was overflowing with women and girls. Emaciated, barely able to remain upright, they were leaning against each other along the walls. Others who lacked even that strength were crowded together on their bunks or lying next to the bunk on the bare floor.⁶

⁵ Ruth Elias, Triumph of Hope. From Theresienstadt and Auschwitz to Israel. New York, Chichester: John Wiley & Sons, in assoc. with the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 1999. 288 pp. (Tr. from the German)

⁶ Years later when I saw Peter Weiss' play, "Marat/Sade", a scene reminded me of that Krätzeblock.

Halina said that she was imprisoned because she had smuggled Jewish babies out of a ghetto (Warsaw?). One day she took us aside and sang several Zionist songs for us. After that we guessed that she must have been in Birkenau under an assumed name.

Evenings, as the agricultural work details came back from the fields, dragging themselves through the camp gate, they were often searched for vegetables they might have brought with them. If they noticed that a search was on in the column ahead of them, they dropped their precious booty - usually carrots and potatoes - for fear of getting whipped or even killed. I was standing at the gate. Next to me a female German camp guard was shouting at the exhausted prisoners who were trying not to call attention to themselves, "Hurry, move, hurry." As soon as the column of women prisoners had passed, the guard told me to pick up the vegetables. I had to carry them into the guard house. Sometimes the guard would let me keep some of the carrots and potatoes. I took them to the barrack of the orchestra. The next Sunday Eva and I went to Renate and Anita. Renate suggested that we cook the vegetables in large quantities of water. In that way there would be more of it. We shared this watery mush and felt -- for a moment -- fortunate and uncomfortably full. Almost unable to move, we had to laugh at our own discomfort as we fell back onto Anita's bunk. I don't think I gave any thought to the women who had tried to bring these vegetables into camp and who would have eaten them raw if they had been able to hold on to them, but I do remember becoming strangely aware of the sound of our laughter.

Some of the young Slovak and Polish girls we knew had male friends. They came into the women's camp on real or pretended errands. There were sexual encounters, and the girls received food, silk stockings and sundry other otherwise unobtainable "goods". And we learned a Polish song that spelled it all out: It started with a common curse and ended with the statement: "for a piece of margarine I am willing to kiss for half an hour." Eva and I, at sixteen very young and very scrawny, scarcely inhabited our own bodies. We seemed to exist, both physically and mentally on some other plane.

During those summer months, even before we had had to leave the family camp, thousands upon thousands of Hungarian Jews arrived and were immediately gassed. Almost hourly their trains pulled in. We saw endless streams of men, women and children, carrying smaller children and bundles, walking in the direction of the gas chambers. The crematoria worked day and night, obliterating the sky in stinking smoke. Very few were selected for work details. Among those who were spared - perhaps because they were an internationally known curiosity - and, I recall, brought to the family camp, was a family of Jewish vaudevillians, some of whom were midgets while others were of normal height. We occasionally spoke with them. They impressed us with being both courageous and fatalistic.⁷

In late September or early October Eva learned in the office of the Lagerälteste that new transports were expected from Theresienstadt. We thought that since there no longer was a family camp, these transports would either undergo selection at the ramp, or all would be killed immediately upon arrival as had happened to the Hungarians. Those, we were quite certain, were the only alternatives. Our first thought was of Lotte and Danny.

⁷ They were the Opitz family who survived.

When we were deported in May, father had hoped that Lotte and her little boy could remain in Theresienstadt. Now we knew that if she had come with us in May, Lotte would have had a chance to be selected for work with Mania although there was not even a remote chance for Danny to be spared. Eva asked the women who were working at the ramp if there was a way to intercept Lotte. They thought that there might be, and Eva then tried to find Lotte in the confusion of arriving transports. While she never did, she briefly saw a roommate of ours from the youth home and gave her a scarf. (Forty years later Gisela Zamora thanked me for it - Eva was no longer alive.) Eventually, a woman we knew from Theresienstadt told us that she had actually seen Lotte and Danny on the ramp and had briefly spoken with her. She urged her to give up her little boy. Lotte emphatically shook her head. Lotte was not quite nineteen when she and one-year-old Danny were killed.⁸

In early October 1944 several crematoria crews - mostly Jewish prisoners - rebelled. Women prisoners who worked in a munitions factory provided them with explosives to blow up one of the crematoria. Birkenau was shortly to be dismantled, and the crew had been ordered to begin hiding the evidence of the crematoria from the advancing Soviet armies. Daily gassing of incoming transports and of long-time prisoners was nevertheless continuing unabated. The crews' days were numbered; they had long known that they would not be allowed to survive to tell of their experiences. We heard shots and saw the confused running hither and thither of the SS and guards.. It felt as if we were suddenly plunged into a darkness that enveloped everything. A thunderstorm threatened. For a fraction of a moment I felt glad. We were ordered inside our barracks. Almost instantly a rumor of what was happening had reached the women's camp. Those crematoria crews, we knew, had little to lose by their revolt. They were despaired and degraded by the inhuman task the Germans had first invented and then forced them to perform... Even life after the Nazis could hold no hope of redemption for them. All those involved in the revolt were caught and killed by the Nazis.

It was beginning to get cold; Eva brought me an orange-colored wool coat and a pair of good, though slightly small work boots. She herself had got a pair of high boots. Transports of young women were leaving Birkenau for work in Germany, or so it was said. The Polish student, who had so generously given us of her bacon, and her sister were sent on one of these transports. The office in which Eva worked was routinely notified when transports arrived at their destination. But in this instance, no such notification was received. Although we had little doubt at the time about the fate they had met, we never learned where, how, or why this group of prisoners died or, more likely, was killed.

At the beginning of November 1944 we too left Birkenau. Eva and I were put on a transport on which many, if not most, of the surviving young Jewish Slovakian girls were being shipped to a place in Silesia. I recall that Eva told me she thought it was a good thing that we were on the same transport as these Slovak girls. She may even have "volunteered" us for it. Reichenbach (officially called Langenbielau), a satellite camp of Gross Rosen, was not far from Breslau. We were to work in a Telefunken factory. Since this was indoor work and involved precision work rather than heavy labor, it had to be considered a favorable assignment.

⁸ According to the Terezin Initiative, Lotte and Danny were deported on October 12, 1944. Danny, born on October 2, 1943, was little more than a year old.

Reichenbach, Trautenau, Porta-Westfalica, Beendorf, and Wandsbek

Reichenbach, the camp to which we were brought, was, as I found out much later, officially named Langenbielau.¹ It was a satellite camp of Gross-Rosen. Bleak, deserted brick barracks looked uninhabited, but we shared them with some Dutch women and girls who were already working for Telefunken. These women were originally employed by the electronics firm Phillips in Holland. The barracks were extremely cold, and while there were inside washrooms, the latrines were some distance away in the open. A day after our arrival we were marched to the Telefunken factory where we were first tested and then divided into work groups and shifts. Eva worked shifts in a room with one other girl. The two of them had to monitor the temperature of several ovens in which bulbs were heated and pressurized. They were continuously on the run, apparently because if an oven got overheated, it could have exploded. So as soon as they had checked and adjusted one oven, they hurried to the next. According to Eva this had to be accomplished at a fast clip. It is interesting to think that the tests the Telefunken people gave us -- whose content I do not recall -- must have revealed Eva's quickness and general alertness. I got work in a quality control section and alternated between weekly day and night shifts. Sitting in a row at long tables, we had to check the filaments for newly manufactured (vacuum?) tubes. The filaments for these tubes were held in front of us on a special fixture. To be perfect, they had to run exactly parallel to each other. I tended to fall asleep at that task, and when the civilian German supervisor passed my chair in the row of working prisoners, she thumped me on the back to get me to wake up.

Every other week when I worked the night shift, Eva and I saw each other only as our columns passed each other on the road, going in opposite directions. Exposed to the blustery winter weather, we walked what must have been several kilometers. We walked, not quite upright, huddled together. Not one of us was adequately dressed or shod. To defy the elements some of the girls sang a song with the refrain: "Durch die Hosen pfeift der Wind." (The wind blows through our pants). To this day there is nothing quite so reminiscent of that time as when I happen to be feeling cold outdoors in winter.

We shared our bunk bed with Gisa, one of the young Jewish Slovak women. Dark blond, she was a tall woman with a large angular frame. Most importantly she was a very patient person. In Birkenau she had been in charge of the "Sauna" and was housed in a small room adjacent to it. We thought that the prisoners herded into those shower rooms were not taken there to shower but to be gassed. But Gisa said that she had to stoke the ovens, presumably for warm water. Gisa was a very quiet girl; an air of resignation surrounded her. We spoke little with each other and could only guess how she must have suffered in Birkenau. In Reichenbach Gisa and Eva had the same daytime shift, so that I had the bunk to myself when I worked nights. I had more space, but I was freezing more and I felt alone.

¹ I am grateful to Dr. Marlis Buchholz for this information.

After about a month of work I felt a bad pain in my right side. I thought I had a fever. I went to the sick room to speak to the prisoner-physician in charge. She took one look at me and decided that I had jaundice. Apparently I was yellow. I hadn't known because there were no mirrors; neither Eva nor Gisa had noticed, probably because we rarely saw each other in day light. There was no thought of the special diet doctors prescribe in normal times. But the doctor decided that I should stay in the sick room so that I would not have to go to work. The sick room was, if anything, colder and less inviting than the rest of the house. The bunks in that room were occupied by young girls who coughed, sighed and, sometimes, cried. For four weeks I shared my bunk with another girl; both of us had fever, but it was probably due to different causes. During that time another girl, lying in the bunk next to mine, died. Just before her death, she made what looked like a last, valiant, attempt to get out of her bed. For a moment she stood there, tall and thin, her uncombed blond hair framed her narrow face. Then she collapsed. The woman physician was reluctant to say so, but somehow we knew that this girl had died of an advanced case of tuberculosis. After work, whenever Eva could, she slipped into the sick room and begged me to get better. As soon as I was able, I returned to her and went back to the factory.

But before long I fell sick with a bad cold and cough. I had a lot of pain breathing. I went back to the doctor who told me: "there might be something wrong with your heart." I do not know why she thought that diagnosis preferable to bronchitis or pneumonia. Somehow I did not believe her. I had a fever and with each breath my left side hurt. I suspected that there was something wrong with my lungs. The doctor did give me some pills to lower my fever. She warned me to use them sparingly because they were in very short supply.

Our bunk bed was extremely narrow, and the three of us always slept facing in the same direction. We turned in unison. I asked Eva and Gisa to lie as much as possible on their left side since I was very uncomfortable lying on my right. I could not allow my left side to expand fully and lying on it helped prevent it. They agreed to try. During the day whenever Eva asked how I felt, I denied that I had pain, I even denied it to myself.

We only stripped to wash in the ice cold washroom. And to keep a semblance of civilized behavior, we went outside to the latrine even during the bitter cold nights when many girls simply relieved themselves in the hallway near the washroom.

Despite my denials, I was having quite a bit of pain, and going to work was starting to be difficult. I did not think it would help to go back to the sickroom where conditions had not gotten any better. Because rather than recuperate, the sick rarely returned to us. So I continued to go to work at Telefunken although the long march to the factory was exhausting. Neither did I expect any help from the civilian Germans with whom I worked. My only contact with them continued to be their thumps on my back to wake me and remind me to work.

In the beginning of 1945 we heard rumors that Russian troops were advancing toward Breslau (now Wroclaw). We would have to move so that we would not “fall into their hands.” Another Telefunken factory would make use of us. This became the pattern for the next five months. It was still dark when we had roll call on the 18th of February. The date was a good omen to me. (In Hebrew, numbers are indicated by letters. And eighteen spells “Chai” --life). We were given a small loaf of bread to be shared by several girls and told it would have to last us several days. Then we were marched out of the camp.

Our march took us south over winding, snow-covered mountain passes of the Riesengebirge. The road overlooked a valley dotted with clusters of villages. A mixture of bare trees and firs could be seen on the horizon. The snow glistened in the cold sun. That first day of our march I was amazed to see the undisturbed beauty of the land. We spent the night huddled together in some barns just off the main road. The next morning the guards and their dogs drove us on. When one of us fell by the wayside, we tried to help her up at once. We knew that those who stayed behind were shot. On the second day, Eva gave way to her exhaustion and refused to go on. She sat down by the side of the road and insisted that she would rather die than take another step. Gisa and I pulled her up, but her legs in those high boots were buckling under her. For some distance she resisted us as we half dragged, half carried her between us. First we begged her to hold out, then we scolded her. Finally she came to her senses, perhaps she realized that she had made us extremely anxious. She promised to try and go on.

There was one young girl who always walked flanked by two older girls who supported her. She looked extremely frail. We heard that she was not yet fourteen. Eva and I were almost seventeen; we were sorry for her and felt like veterans compared to her.

The second night of the march we were put up in the loft of another barn. There was too little space even for such as us who were used to inhuman conditions. Our group was exhausted and irritable. Fights broke out among us for some space and some straw. A sleepless night would make for even greater exhaustion the next day. Most of us tried to settle somehow. Eva and I had discovered a farm cart and squeezed ourselves into the space underneath and lay unexpectedly snugly between its front and back wheels. All of a sudden, drowning out most of the bickering, we heard singing by what seemed to be a number of men. They sounded like a practiced choir, singing song after song. The fighting subsided as everyone strained to listen. Looking into the barn below us, we saw perhaps fifty men, lying in neat, ascending rows in the straw. It was an odd spectacle: they were singing, lying on a stage of straw, and we, the “audience”, lay and crouched in the loft well above them among all kinds of farm implements. The barn resounded with their voices. These Russian men were slave laborers or prisoners of war. We listened to them for what seemed like hours, and their song made us forget our discomfort and quarrels. I noticed that before morning some of the Slovakian girls had a chance to speak with them, but they did not tell us what they found out.

The final day of the march was the worst. By now everyone was exhausted. Before we left Reichenbach, the doctor had given Eva a few more of those pills to control my recurring fever. She carried them in the same pocket of her blouse where she kept father's identity card, and she was guarding both with her life. She herself had developed an infected finger, and the cold made the pain even worse. It was evening before we arrived in a camp in Trautenau. We had crossed the German border into Czechoslovakia.

Eva's finger was badly swollen. She was told to go to the sick bay to have it looked at. She would probably have to lose her nail. When she refused to go, a German guard yelled at her: "Do you want me to shoot it off?" At that Eva went to the sick bay. Without benefit of an anesthetic, the infection was lanced and the nail removed.

There were both Jewish men and women in this camp. Behind the barbed wire the unshaved, gaunt faces of these ragged men looked both terrible and pitiful. My first thought was of father and that men must have an even harder time surviving in camp than women; they were treated worse, and some found it difficult to take care of themselves. I imagined how father would have suffered under these conditions.

Whenever we happened to be outside and got near the men's camp, they would come as close to the barbed wire as they possibly could. They stared at us as if they were seeing ghosts; scanning our faces, they called out different names: "Rifka, Soorele, Rosy?" If only for an instant they seemed to be hoping to find, or get news of, their wives and daughters. They said that they had been separated from them months ago when they arrived in Birkenau. I think they were Hungarians, and we knew what had probably happened. What could we say to them? We said we did not know...

We did not stop long in Trautenau. Within a week we were being loaded into open coal wagons with low side walls. It was still February and bitter cold. The train had no engine, and until one arrived several days later, we stayed on the railroad siding. The nights especially were hard to bear. Eva's infected finger was still very painful, and it made her extremely restless. Several times she attempted to jump out of the wagon. It would have been quite easy for her, and Gisa and I had to hold her down to stop her. All along this long freight train we heard moaning and whimpering. Gradually I became aware that similar sounds were coming out of our own throats. When the engine finally arrived, we had no idea in what direction we were being taken.

There were times while we were traveling when Allied sorties flew over our open wagons. They dropped leaflets over the countryside, but not close enough for us. Once, bombs began raining down all around us. Our train stopped so that the SS guards could run for cover in nearby woods. We stayed on the open road in the open wagons. But those bombs left me, and probably the other girls also, quite undisturbed -- by now we had little to lose. After about one week, on March 1, 1945 we arrived in Porta Westfalica.

Until then I had not realized that we were back in Germany. The camp was completely new and even unfinished, built to serve an equally new underground Telefunken factory some distance away.² The barracks were huge, made of new wood, inside and out. My fever came back. I tried, nonetheless, to go to work with Eva. The very first day in the underground factory, I fainted, and Eva and I decided that I would have to go to the sick bay, at least for while. We were more and more afraid of being separated and wanted to avoid it at all cost. For several days I stayed in the barrack. At night we could hear airplanes overhead and the responding flak. The girls hoped that the Allies were advancing, and they sang a number of Yiddish songs: “Es brennt, Städtele, es brennt,” “Meine Städtele Belz”, and “Kauft schon Papirosse, Trockene von Regen nit Vergossen.” Porta Westfalica was the last camp in which we were together with our original group from Birkenau.

My fever seemed to be quite high. Once I was lying down I felt as if I were floating just below the ceiling. Bombing raids became more frequent, but I heard the sirens as if the sound came from a great distance. One evening when Eva came on her daily visits to see me, she tried to rouse me. I heard her beg me: “Rutchen, Rutchen, bitte, bitte sterbe nicht” (please, please don’t die). I wondered why she was repeating every word. When I finally managed to ask her what she wanted, she burst out: “You were’nt listening, and though you did not look asleep, I couldn’t get you to pay attention to me!” Her anxiety almost overwhelmed both of us. I promised I would not die. We talked of our sister in England--but even more we talked about the beet roots which, awake for a moment, I had seen someone bring into the kitchen. Eva, relieved to have brought me around, said she would try and “organize” one for me. The next day she came back and reported sadly that she had been caught with her beet. A German guard had taken the beet away from her and slapped her face to boot.

Rumors made the round that we would be leaving this camp also. Eva went to the person in charge of the sick bay and asked to get me released. Even though Eva promised to take responsibility for me, I was not allowed to leave the sick room. At that her ever present anxiety went into high gear. She could do little but watch as we sick girls left Porta Westfalica ahead of the remainder of the camp inmates. We were loaded onto a V-shaped horse-drawn cart. There was no room for anyone to lie, so the sickest among us were put on the very narrow strip on the bottom, and we had to stand on top of these moribund, inert women. At a railroad siding we were loaded into a separate freight car, but we were on the same train as Eva. It was April 1. We had been in Porta Westfalica for exactly one month.

This trip began very badly. Although there was more room for the sick than in the other box cars, doors and windows were sealed and the air was stifling, permeated by a smell of excrement. The sick women were moaning much of the time. Within hours of the start of the journey one of the women died. Somewhere along the route, the train

² This factory complex and others like it, built by slave labor late in the war, have been investigated by Rainer Fröbe and others and published in German publications. Porta Westfalica was one of a long list of satellite camps of Neuengamme.

stopped. I managed to get out and find my way to Eva. Surprised and relieved to see me, she helped me up into the box car.

After perhaps a day in the freight train, we arrived at a railroad siding in front of Bergen Belsen. We stayed on that siding for some days but were not “allowed” into the camp. While our train was standing there a German Red Cross train arrived across the platform. It was packed with badly wounded German soldiers. They stared at us and we at them. They must have known that we were concentration camp prisoners. Although I could not bear to look at their bloody bandages, I felt little compassion for them. And I wondered how they felt about us.³

As Bergen Belsen would not have us, we were taken to a camp called Beendorf. It was not known how long we would be staying, but we were assigned a top bunk in a barrack, and I was totally unable to hoist myself up. Eva and I again decided that I should go back to the sick bay. Conditions there were not to be endured. I shared my bunk with a dying girl. When I tried to get space on another bunk, the emaciated woman who occupied it demanded my soup ration. I decided I would rather sleep on the floor in front of Eva’s bunk than stay in that sick room. The next morning I left and looked for Eva. She was glad to see me stand in front of her bunk. Now there were several girls who offered to help me climb up. In addition to her still infected finger, Eva had developed several deep, festering sores on her right calf. With each step she took, the shaft of her boot rubbed against these open wounds. There were no bandages, and there was no one who could give her any treatment.

Beendorf was in a very poor, neglected condition, and its prisoners were covered in lice. When Eva discovered the first lice on her cardigan, she threw it away. The only clothes we had were those we wore. Soon enough we realized that we would be left without any clothes if we threw away all those infested with vermin. By the time we left Beendorf, at most a week after our arrival, we were totally infested with lice. Eva begged me, before we left, that I examine her hair to see if she had any lice. She had been so good to me, I could not very well refuse although I hated to do it. She felt no different when I asked her to return the favor.

Our convoy had grown with the addition of the prisoners from Beendorf. (I do not know if all Beendorf was emptied out at that time.) We had lost what little cohesion our original group from Reichenbach had had. Several freight cars in which Jewish male prisoners were held had been hitched to our train. There may have been as many as one thousand of us prisoners.

One day we stopped on the Lüneburger Heide (heath), not far from our hometown of Hanover. To our surprise we were let out of our freight cars into a beautiful spring day. Some of the male prisoners thought that the wooden terrain offered

³ Not being let into Bergen-Belsen probably helped save our lives. As for that railroad siding, I saw it again on July 5, 1998. At that time I also received confirmation from Dr. Claus Füllberg-Stolberg that at that time a German field hospital had been located nearby.

them a chance for escape. They may have assumed that the Germans no longer possessed the will to control them. Everyone understood that the Allies were quite near because we could hear what we thought were sounds of battle. But the men trying to escape were shot before they could get very far. While we were happy to think that we were hearing the Allies coming closer, the SS guards were shooting the escaped prisoners. In their striped prisoners' clothes, there was nowhere they could possibly hide, and even if someone would have been willing to shelter them, such a person would have been hard to find on the sparsely populated heath.

This event forced us to realize how precarious our situation really was: It was by no means certain that the SS guards would allow us to go free. They had now spent months transporting us from the east to the south, then to the west and from there to the north of Germany to evade the approaching Allies. What or who was to prevent our guards from shooting the lot of us? Indeed, some of the older girls asserted that this was exactly what was going to be our fate.

Several large kettles of soup had been prepared outside on the heath. Eva and I stood on what looked like an interminable line waiting to get our helping. When I chanced to look up at the sky, I saw large threatening clouds. It was sure to rain before long. Instantly, I took Eva by the hand and we raced to the front of the line as if we were embarked on some urgent errand. Before anyone could question us or protest our temerity, we had our soup and ran back to our car. We dropped down with fatigue. Rain was pelting everyone outside. We escaped the downpour, but not the dripping women who eventually returned to our car with their soup.

There were about one hundred prisoners in each freight car. I could feel my temperature rising. The entrance in the center of the car was kept slightly ajar. A German woman guard sat there. Eva and I had first seen this young woman in Birkenau. We called her "Die Puppe" (the doll) because she was so pretty. I was feeling so much in need of air, I began to whimper. Naturally it made me feel, if anything, worse. But I needed to be heard and to be allowed near the opening of the car to get some air. I was lucky. The other women actually helped me to move to the front. The German guard made me sit down. She handed me her flask and told me to drink: "Here, take a sip." I did. It was brandy. And not being used to alcohol, I began to sweat profusely. But as a result of this drastic thirst quencher, my fever dropped and I actually began to feel better.

After we left the Lüneburger Heide we traveled north in the direction of Hamburg. For the last three days of this journey we had neither food nor drink. It was the longest hunger spell we had to endure. On the third day some of the women, unable to bear their thirst any longer, asked for and got some water from the locomotive. It could be used for washing one's hands and face, but hardly drunk. Eva and I also got some of this rather brackish water and decided to use it to wash our very dirty hands. Such was their desperate need for some fluid, this did not prevent some of the girls from asking for our water and drinking what we had washed in.

It must have been the third week of April when we arrived in a camp near Hamburg. It was probably Wandsbek, another camp administered by Neuengamme. By now all of us were totally emaciated, starved and full of hair and body lice. We had truly come to the end of our endurance. There was very little food in the camp, and we spent most of our time in a kind of stupor, apathetically sitting or lying on our bunk beds. We had to be up for roll calls, and I found it hard to stand upright for any length of time. One day as Eva was walking behind me, I heard her sobbing. Worried, I turned around and asked her what had happened? "Nothing", she said. She had looked at my legs and seen how thin they were. She was sure they were going to break! Unlike me, Eva kept some of her emotional responsiveness all during camp. Sometimes that resulted in her imagination creating fears that even exceeded our reality... She seemed to have few if any means for self-protection, no escape hatch. My own reactions were so different that it was difficult for us to understand each other. Even in camp that made us at times very irritable, and then we would quarrel with each other.

In the early morning of May 1, 1945, we had our usual roll call. We were told that we would, again, be moved out of the camp. As usual we were not told where we were going to be shipped. By the time we were loaded onto the train it was early afternoon. For the first time, no more than fifty women occupied each freight car so that we could actually sit down. More unusual still, the floor was covered with straw. All this greatly surprised but also frightened us. Some of the girls again asserted that it was entirely possible that we were about to be shot and the straw had been put there to absorb our blood! These somewhat more tolerable conditions were intended solely to fool us.

As our train began to move someone said that we were going in the direction of Denmark. Perhaps, for once, our pessimism was not warranted? What did all this mean? Eva and I looked at each other. We were too tired to talk, and it was so long since we last dared think that our ordeal might one day come to an end. Then, somewhere in the countryside, the train was stopped for us to relieve ourselves. Even such permission was a rare event, worthy of wonder. While we were squatting between two freight cars, we heard a shout: "Hitler is dead. He committed suicide." There was no longer any reason to doubt it: for us the war was over.

Eva looked for father's identity card. She wanted to look at Vati's picture. It was no longer in the breast pocket of her blouse. She found it on the ground not far from us. Someone had used Vati's identity card for her toilet needs. Eva was inconsolable. Finally, I thought of a way to comfort her. I reminded her that we were sure to get pictures of father once we were in touch with Grete again. That made sense to her and she brightened up.

In the evening of the same day, we crossed the German-Danish border at Padborg. We had really left Germany behind us. We were free.

Liberation

The men and women who open our freight cars are dressed in white and wear armbands with Red Cross insignia. They bring low ladders to help us climb down. Cheerfully, repeatedly, they reassure us that we have indeed arrived in Denmark. We need no longer doubt that we are safe. Still, a few feet away from us, on the other side of the railway line, our former SS guards linger, watching these proceedings. And then, some of our fellow prisoners, now free as are we, walk over to them. They shake hands with those who, only moments earlier, have been their and our unpredictable and implacable tormentors. Just a few weeks ago, they killed those desperate, brave men who tried to find their freedom on the Lüneburger Heide. Eva and I look at each other in disbelief. We have not the slightest wish to shake hands with these people, and no regret to see them finally disappear on the German side of the border.

On heavy white pottery plates the Danish Red Cross workers hand us steaming oatmeal over which they ladle cold milk. It looks and tastes delicious to us. Most of the Danes know German, but even those who talk to us in Danish are not difficult to understand. They want to explain why they decided to serve us such simple fare. When the first group of prisoners arrived, they fed them a meal of meat, potatoes, and spinach. Few were able to tolerate such substantial food, and many got ill. Eva and I enjoy our oatmeal. I feel so well, I tell Eva that I am sure my fever has disappeared, and with it whatever it was that made me sick all these months.

By bus we are moved to a reception center. There are bunk beds that look as if they have just been built, and they are covered with white sheets and blankets. We touch the sheets and look around us, and then we hug each other. Everything is clean and light and inviting, and every word spoken to us is kind and intended to reassure us. We have come to a different world.

Very early the next morning we are gathered to be taken by train and ferry to Copenhagen and from there by a second ferry to Sweden. Despite all our recent "travels", Eva and I enjoy the train ride and stand at the window to watch the countryside with its flowering fruit trees. We think that we have never seen anything quite so beautiful. In the fields men and women put down their hoes and rakes when they see our train, straighten their backs and wave to us. They must think we are a strange looking, tattered lot waving to them from the train windows. We were still itching and dirty, but it does not worry us very much. For the trip the Danes have given us packages of cold cut or cheese sandwiches, and it all tastes wonderful. Once we are on the ferry to Sweden, we are encouraged to shed our outer garments and to toss them overboard because we will be receiving new, clean clothes upon our arrival. But few of us can quite believe those promises.

The dining room on the ferry is furnished with round tables and easy chairs upholstered in dark red plush. I hesitate before sitting down at the table to be served still another breakfast, because my clothes are crawling with lice, and I foresee the result on those plush chairs. A waiter tells me: "Don't you worry, Miss (!)" and I sit down to enjoy my meal.

After a short trip on the ferry we reached Malmö at the southern tip of Sweden. As we entered the harbor, I discovered that I had lost a new identity card we had been given in Denmark. Eva, annoyed and as always worried about the consequences of my carelessness, scolded me severely. I refused to believe that this loss was irreparable. We were still arguing when our pictures were taken. I still have that picture, and while it shows some of the hardships I had undergone, it also registers my quarrel with Eva. The loss of the card turned out to be quite unimportant. Knowing when fear was warranted, and when it was not, was going to be extremely difficult to learn for both Eva and me.

From Malmö we immediately went to Hälsingborg. A school had been converted into temporary quarters for us. On the evening of our arrival nurses and physicians bathed and disinfected us. I experienced a moment of real happiness when I got a cake of fragrant light green Palmolive soap. Gladly I gave up every shred of my old, lice-infested clothes. I wanted to keep the leather belt I had worn on my black felt dress since Birkenau -- for about ten months --, but the nurse who supervised the proceedings dissuaded me. Clad only in nightgowns we were shown to our beds. I was disappointed when it turned out that these were covered with paper sheets. I had already been spoilt by the Danes' cotton sheets.

But for the first time in two years, we have our own bed. For one or two days I thought I was quite well until I found it almost impossible to walk upstairs -- a weight in my lungs was dragging me down. I was put into a sick room. Soon all of us were x-rayed.

Within days, without too much ceremony, a young Swedish physician told me that I had pleurisy on both sides. There was a great deal of fluid in my lungs. He expected it was all caused by an underlying tuberculosis. Its extent could not be determined from the x-ray because the fluid obscured the details of the picture. My temperature had risen again. Eva, told of this diagnosis, reacted with deep anxiety. Again she begged me not to die. I tried not to show her how unhappy I was myself while some voice in me reiterated: You have TB. It was a disease I knew from novels I had read. Those suffering from it usually were poets or other artists. I was neither. Our bedmate Gisa also had a mild case of tuberculosis. I soon found out that it was the most prevalent disease among us. Then Eva fell ill. She had a very painful sore throat and high temperature that was later diagnosed as scarlet fever. When we were weighed more than a week after our liberation, Eva weighed forty and I thirty-four kilo.

Some of our fellow camp mates had a very difficult time believing in the reality of their liberation. They feared that their suffering and hunger would, somehow, return.

It was as if their current life were a pleasant dream from which they would wake to find themselves back in their old familiar nightmare. At mealtime, they took more than they could eat, and they stored the left-overs under and in their beds. When crowds of curious Swedes congregated outside the windows of our temporary housing, our camp mates pointed to themselves, like us, still clad only in nightgowns, and asked the Swedes for clothing. In response the Swedes would bring both new and used clothing. Eva and I reoriented ourselves quite quickly. We readily believed that we would no longer have to starve and that, eventually, we would receive clothes and other necessities.

Around the third week of May all those who had been diagnosed as having TB were transferred to another temporary hospital in Halmstad. Unlike siblings of other patients, Eva was allowed to stay with me. Later I was to learn why. She had been told that the doctors could not be sure I would recover. But some weeks later, when a probe was inserted into my left lung to extract the accumulated fluid, most of it had dried or been absorbed. This was considered very good news. My appetite was excellent, and I had every intention of living. In fact I began to reflect that I had been patient much too long. It was time I let them know that I was in pain. Now, whenever it hurt me to breathe, I complained loudly. This only made the pain worse.

One day, a middle-aged woman physician sat herself down on my bed. Brusquely she told me that I could expect to have some pain breathing for the rest of my life: "You might as well get used to it." It was hardly a pleasant prospect -- although I had trouble understanding what she meant by "the rest of my life". But I stopped complaining.

At the beginning of July the physician in charge of the Halmstad facility, a Dr. Citron from Danzig, and it was said, that woman-physician's "special friend," chose ten patients for transfer to a Swedish sanatorium that had offered to put us up. I was lucky to be among those ten whose prognosis, while uncertain, was not considered hopeless. (Perhaps an instance of triage?) And so, just about two months after our arrival in Sweden, on July 4, I began my life in the only Swedish setting I came to know well, the Fagered Sanatorium near Falkenberg. However, while several of us girls recuperated well, at least one third of the girls of our first group died during the first year despite our physicians' best efforts. At that time their means of treatment were still severely limited.

Eva meanwhile received an invitation from a family in Stockholm, the Weingartens, who had known our family in Hanover, where they had owned a raincoat factory. Eva accepted their offer to join them and discovered, not unlike Grete in 1939, that her new hosts' motives were, at best, mixed. Eva performed the duties of a maid in their household. Although she was only seventeen, she was not encouraged or helped to resume her schooling. The family had two young adult sons. One, perhaps mentally unstable, spent his time at home while the other was in business with his father. At times these two young men made life very unpleasant for her. But Eva had changed, and she was now more reluctant, perhaps even afraid, to complain. If there was a central agency responsible for the refugees who were brought to Sweden, she did not know of its

existence. Eva was thus quite alone with her difficulties and had no idea how to go about changing her difficult situation.

Eva's first effort after our arrival in Sweden was to find out whether Mania, our stepmother, had survived. After months of fruitless inquiries, she wrote me that Mania probably had perished some time between February and May 1945. Mania was last seen by a fellow Hanoverian in February in Stutthof, a camp near Danzig. (Some of the surviving German Jews from the Riga ghetto were sent to Stutthof.) Mania was forty-seven years old. She had been a healthy, stately and very resourceful woman. Aside from the physical deprivation and hardships she, by all accounts, must have suffered in Stutthof, the separation from her husband, daughter and step-daughters may have undermined both her health and will to live. I now have a document showing her arrival in Stutthof. After her name and birthdate and-place it reads: Married. Children: 4. Arrival: 20.7.44. Via: Concentration camp Auschwitz. In Concentration camp: Stutthof. Reason: Unknown.: Prior infractions: none. Special marks: 1.underarm tattoo, "A-2703."¹ That she thought not only of her own daughter Lotte, but even of Margaret, safely in England, as one of her four daughters speaks for her lovingkindness and sincerity and still moves me.

A few months later there was more terrible news. The war never ended for little Abrammetje. He, his brothers Jacob and Elie, sister Roosje, and their young parents, Victor and Jeanette, had all been killed. The precise dates I learned only recently: Jeanette and her four small children perished on March 13, 1943 in Sobibor as did Victor on March 10, 1943. Eva's host family, the Mijers, went underground in Holland. It was however much more complicated and dangerous than that would indicate and required being constantly on the move. Their younger son, Benny, was betrayed and survived both Auschwitz and Mauthausen. It was their good fortune to have had three older children and only one small girl who was five when they hid her. Their oldest daughter, Gerda, worked with the resistance. They also had the requisite courage and self-reliance, and some financial means and friends among non-Jewish farmers and Dutch cattle dealers who were willing to help them. Although they lost many of their extended family and underwent many trials, they emerged from the war with their immediate family intact.²

Grete had been notified by the Swedish Red Cross that we had been rescued, and we started writing each others immediately. Eva also began an active correspondence with our relatives in Palestine and our uncle in New York. To our delight our maternal grandmother, Charlotte Kiss, was alive. She lived with a married, childless daughter, our Aunt Blanca in Jerusalem. We were hoping to join them eventually, and they encouraged us in that hope. Mother's favorite brother, Bela, (Ben) was living in Haifa with his wife Rachel and two sons. While we had never actually met any of our relatives except for Uncle Iszo, we were happy to be in touch with them again.

¹ Verheiratet. Kinder: 4. Ankunft 20. July, 1944. Vom KL Auschwitz nach KL Stutthof. Grund: Unbekannt(!). Vorbestrafung: keine.: Besondere Kennzeichen tät. "A-2703" am Unterarm."

² I base this description on information received in 2000 from Gerda Wijler -Mijer.

Eva also wrote to our friends in Zurich, Family Karo. They had for years maintained contact between father in Germany and Grete in England. Now Eva described to them in a few, succinct, dramatic pages what had happened to us and our family. The Karos typed this letter and sent it to the Wiener Library in London. In 1989 when I visited Yad Vashem I found a copy of the letter in their library. As a very early document, written by a 17-year old girl three weeks after her liberation, it is quite remarkable.³ It is also true to Eva's tendency to see everything in rather dramatic terms and contains some unwarranted statements. Eva even made contact with people in Hanover. She heard from Frau Nyszli that she used the few things she had received from our father and Mania for safekeeping to pay for medical treatment for her son, Geza, who had fallen ill with rheumatic fever. Frau Nyszli also related that only hours after we were deported, Mania's Persian carpet was carried out of our apartment in Ahlem by one of the remaining Jewish men (who was married to a non-Jewish woman). Of course she did not know if he had acted on someone's orders!⁴

Fritz and Erika Blankenburg survived the war in Hanover, although Fritz Blankenburg was sent to Theresienstadt in early 1945 together with other Jewish partners living in "mixed marriages."

³ Yad Vashem document 02/365. Clearly, a historian might find some inaccuracies, and I myself question Eva's description of our feelings on seeing Germany's destruction when criss-crossing the country during the last stages of the war as "rejoycing" over what had happened to our enemies. Of course some may well have rejoiced, but many others were too ill and depleted to have any feelings at all.

⁴ In 2000, available documents specifically refer to our two rugs that Nazi officials were reserving for their offices.

Time to Recuperate

At first my illness was a fortunate circumstance for me. It gave me a much needed breathing spell, a time for thought and recuperation which Eva, and many other former prisoners of the Nazis, never had.

As soon as my fever dropped, I was allowed to get up for a few hours. Gradually these hours became days. The physicians making their daily rounds were amused by the drawings on my chart with which I celebrated fever-free days, weight gains and other notable events in my physical recuperation. I also decorated the headboard of my bed with sayings and aphorisms that I was gathering from my reading. By the time I was allowed to go outdoors, it was late autumn. An early snow covered everything in sight. Dark green pines and firs contrasted with the overwhelming whiteness of the landscape. It reminded me of another snowscape I had seen on our march into Czechoslovakia. Though only six months had passed, it was an unimaginable distance away... I enjoyed my walks and almost lost my fear of freezing.

Indoors, in the large sitting rooms where we spent a good part of our day, I learned to speak Swedish with the patients and nurses. The sanatorium had a good library, and the librarian, a theology student and himself a seriously ill patient, hauled out all the books, in Swedish, I wanted to read. For the next two and a half years in Fagered I had a chance to orient myself in the adult world by reading everything in sight, and I eagerly read a mixture of philosophy, fiction and social science. Gunnar Myrdal's "American Dilemma", a problem that President Roosevelt had asked the Swedish political scientist to investigate, introduced me to the central problem of the America of that time and to this day: that of the inequality of life's opportunities for the different "races." It was a subject I had no trouble understanding because of my own experience with irrational intolerance.

The earphones at my bed were almost always tuned to a classical music station. I felt like crying when I heard Beethoven sonatas and Brahms intermezzi that I had last heard Grete play at home. When I wrote Margaret that I had heard "Yom Kippur ist vorbei", she answered that it was Beethoven's 10th piano sonata. Relieved that the long Day of Atonement was over, John Mandelbrod, the conductor of our synagogue choir in Hannover and her piano teacher, had sung those words as he mounted the stairs to our apartment when he came to teach her. For the first time I heard Gershwin's music, even his folk opera, "Porgy and Bess." But whenever I heard a male voice sing German Lieder or the Mozart arias my father I had sung, I quickly took off my headset. It was to be years before I could bear to listen to vocal music sang by male voices.

I learned that our liberation and the asylum we had been given in Sweden were the result of Count Folke Bernadotte's negotiations with Himmler or his associates. Some time during April 1945, Himmler or his intermediary was said to have approached the Count, a nephew of the Swedish king, with a proposal to take over some of the prisoners still alive in the various camps in Northern Germany. At first this meant

primarily Danish and Norwegian Jews. But then Sweden decided to welcome the influx of a mixed population: we were from Germany, Poland, Hungary, the Balkans and the Baltic states. While many of us were sick, this was deemed the result of general deprivation and hunger. Our very survival -- aside from sheer luck -- seemed proof of a basically healthy constitution. Sweden had long coped with tuberculosis having a rather high incidence of the disease in its own population. In fact, many of the Swedes I got to know had been in the sanatorium repeatedly and not a few were very ill.

At times our environment with its strict routine and the short days during long winter months became quite depressing. Grave illness was a constant topic. We refugees nonetheless managed to be not only cheerful but also mischievous. We broke all the rules of the place, and these transgressions ran the gamut from missed rest periods or dancing the tango to an unwanted pregnancy. Lucky for us, the chief of the sanatorium, Dr. Victor Steffen, who painted and played the violin when he was not working as a physician, was an exceptionally tolerant and understanding man. When after a long hike in the woods, we girls arrived hours late for dinner, I was made the mouthpiece of our group. Although I had no better excuse than the other girls, he forgave us. Dr. Steffen's wife, Karen, also suffered from tuberculosis. When she, also a physician and the mother of five young daughters, became depressed, her husband asked me to their house to read Heine poems to her.

During the summer and fall of 1945 more groups of former prisoners came to the Sanatorium. Eventually they decided to build a special pavilion for us. While this seemed to segregate us, for us it was easier to be among ourselves. Now we would no longer be scolded for disturbing the Swedish patients. Among the newer arrivals was the fourteen year old girl whom we had so pitied on our three day march to Trautenau. She was making arrangements to meet a cousin in Jerusalem who was said to be her finance. She was actually a couple of years older than I. She had pretended to be a child to evoke the sympathy of fellow prisoners and succeeded in being helped by them. Gisa, who had always been very good to us when we shared our bunk in Reichenbach, briefly stayed in Fagered but soon left to return to her surviving sister in Czechoslovakia. She even sent me a photo from a vacation in the Tatra mountains but neglected to put her last name and address on it, and regrettably I lost touch with her. I shared my room with a non-Jewish Polish woman. She was twice my age, thirty-four or five, but looked older because of a facial palsy. She had been arrested by the Nazis shortly after her officer-husband was killed at Katyn. Her young daughter was in Poland, living with relatives. Her only language was Polish and some French. Since I knew no French, I learned to speak a little Polish, enough to help her communicate with our doctors when they made their rounds. Later we traveled to the nearby town of Varberg together where she was treated by a Swedish dentist. Zofia Stawiczka was an artistically gifted woman who appreciated the beauty of the surrounding landscape. When we walked together she pointed out the fine details of flowers and plants to me that I would not have noticed. She continued to suffer of a low-grade fever and spent most of her time creating dolls in Polish national dress. To me, she was very motherly, and she comforted me when she felt I needed to be.

It was difficult not to be upset when girls whom I had gotten to know in the Sanatorium got sicker and sicker and finally gave up their fight to stay alive. Most were young girls in their late teens or early twenties for whom liberation from years of incarceration and starvation had come too late. After months of illness and suffering, they died. Glikel had survived many years of “life” in the Lodz Ghetto. Her pain threshold was rather low, and my friends and I were often impatient with her frequent complaints of aches and pains. Then she was stricken with tubercular meningitis. Now she suffered excruciating head pain. She was isolated from the rest of us, but her cries could be heard through the wall that separated us from her. There were no antibiotics, and pain killers seemed to have little effect. The only member of a large family to have survived the war, death finally claimed Glikel also. Mentally I had frequently refused to feel sorry for her when she was complaining of pain while she seemed to be recuperating with us. While I protected myself, I had failed her. My impatience with her many complaints had been terribly unjust, but my remorse came too late. Other young girls slipped away quietly and almost heroically.

Perhaps it was these girls’ suffering and their eventual deaths that shamed me into questioning my general cheerfulness. At times I was downright optimistic although there was little reason for it. My childhood faith, jolted well before my incarceration, had long been replaced by a pervasive skepticism. I decided that I had inherited my optimistic attitude from my father, and like his, it defied reason. Nevertheless, Eva’s and my survival encouraged me to be hopeful. Why had we been so lucky? When we were asked: “How come you survived?” I could only answer that it was luck that had enabled us to survive. Then why did I feel shame whenever I thought myself lucky? We had been neither particularly courageous nor particularly smart. Had we not behaved decently toward our fellow prisoners? Even if we had wanted to “sell” ourselves for food, as was occasionally intimated by our questioners, who would have found two skinny young girls attractive?

No one ever asked us that far more difficult question: how come you landed in concentration camp? We ourselves hardly dared ask it. It was years before I was able to read contemporary history. While I find explanations verging on excuses and theories that contradict each other, or worse still, deny the events or blame the victims, I have yet to find an “overarching” explanation for the catastrophic events of the war years. I thought a lot about my past life and tried to understand what had happened if only to find some meaning for my feelings. I did not want to hate the Germans, and I did not want to blame my father for having been too trusting or too obedient. I only rarely used the phrase: “If only”, but I could not believe that what happened to us had been inevitable or could not have been averted, or worse still, that somehow we had brought it upon ourselves.

Several factors were pivotal in our survival: Father’s decision to bring us back to Hanover late in 1941; the relative lateness of our deportation in June 1943; our (fraternal) twinship and our way of compensating for each other’s weaknesses during our

time in camp; our inexplicable resilience and innate self-control. I often wondered what would have happened if father's request to join the Riga transport had been granted. It would have spared him the agonies of the last two years in Hanover -- but would Eva and I have survived? Not many Hanoverian Jews survived of the original 1,000 Jews sent to Riga from our congregation. Our twinship, a condition Eva said she had always disliked, helped us to survive in Auschwitz. As a result we got to Reichenbach (i.e., Langenbielau) in somewhat better condition. Even so I fell sick soon thereafter. Finally I was fortunate to have been taken to Sweden so soon and put into the hands of competent physicians who were trying to help us and in many instances succeeded.

My future was shrouded in darkness. I was aware of the temptation my illness afforded me to be taken care of for the rest of my life. If I was to reenter every-day life, I would have to overcome not only that temptation but also the power of this particular illness to stigmatize and exclude me from the rest of humanity.

I began to seek explanations that might help me understand my questions if not my experiences. It was impossible to make any sense of the past few years. Occasionally a nurse in the sanatorium would ask us to tell her about our life in the camps. We all reacted in the same way: we recalled an incident with some humorous implication and dissolved in uncontrollable laughter. Thus we managed to evade the harsh facts. Despite this avoidance I was certain that I would never forget my experiences. Holding on to my memories was a necessity, my means of preserving the tenuous thread of continuity in my life. At times those memories, powerful and inconvenient, made the present appear unimportant and without significance. Then I recalled my mother's expressed wish for a less good memory. I was beginning to understand what she had meant.

Very soon it was made clear to me that once I left the sanatorium it would be very difficult for me to go to school. And, as Dr. Steffen wrote to Grete, he was against my going to Stockholm in order to get an education. Both doctors and nurses reiterated that I would have to be "careful" all my life. Why should I fare any better than Eva or the other girls whom no one thought of giving an opportunity for an education? A few years later in England, when I dared voice my pain at lacking almost all formal education, I was told: "Don't be so ambitious. Be glad you survived." It became a refrain I was to hear from many quarters.

At home I had learned that worldly goods were of relatively little importance, and I had come to similar conclusion. Among the many reasons why the Jews did not leave Germany in time, their fear of losing the security provided by their possessions played a significant role. It was reinforced by the additional fear of finding no means to support themselves in a strange country. They could not know that eventually they would be condemned to lose not only their possessions but their life. Perhaps if they had been less afraid of the hardships of poverty in a new country, a few more Jews could have saved themselves--provided that other countries would have offered them shelter. My judgments of the relative importance of events and material things were also based on

criteria I had acquired during the previous few years. As a result I found it difficult to sympathize with anyone's material concerns or losses, and for a long time I had trouble understanding that such ordinary concerns of most people were not simply trivial.

I looked for precepts that could guide me, but there were few I believed truly important. My attitude toward my fellow human beings became my most crucial concern: I knew that to be indifferent to the suffering of others was unforgivable. I neither wanted to inflict pain on others nor to be hurt myself. At the same time I expected little help or sympathy from others, and it surprised me when someone acted with greater considerateness than I had expected.

I had lost my faith in God but not my fear of Him. Now I was a human being before I was a Jew. In concentration camp I had found repeatedly that when people were in great need, stripped of all pretense, their religion had played little or no role in their behavior toward others. I had experienced kindness and cruelty from Jew and non-Jew alike. What enabled some to act humanely while others forgot all human decency was truly inexplicable. Despite the fact that my whole life, in all its aspects, had been determined by my being a Jew, and I intended to remain a Jew, I could no longer consider the attribute of Jewishness on the part of others of prime importance in my relations with them. Religion, I had learned, added a dimension of divisiveness to an already belligerent humanity that possibly outweighed its undeniable civilizing benefits.

In themselves these notions were not particularly troubling to me, and I might have come to the same conclusions if my experiences had been more ordinary. My reading of Plato strengthened my belief that some of my ideas were innate. But I had trouble sorting out which of my notions were due to those eventful years and which were not. Trying to imagine what kind of person I could have become if my life had taken a different turn was a futile exercise. I had to conclude that my experiences set me apart from much of humanity. Not even Eva or my fellow camp mates shared the lessons I had learned from our common experiences. While I would not have minded standing somewhat apart from others, there was a gulf of incomprehension between myself and others which I did not know how to bridge except by ignoring, if not denying, what I had experienced.

At times my solution was to refuse to admit the centrality in my life of what had been done to us and to maintain that I was shaped as much, or more, by my early years as by my incarceration. More rarely I managed to admit my estrangement, but while I mocked my pain as a form of self-importance, I felt less insubstantial and less dishonest on those occasions.

Despite my generally optimistic attitude I found it almost impossible to make plans or to undertake any initiative. I could not believe with any consistency that the future existed for me. Death was the only certainty. This inability cast a pall on all effort. When life presented challenges or difficulties, a feeling of futility immediately beckoned and had to be fought before I could begin to make any plans at all. At times

this futility, or despair, became a crutch and at others an excuse for inaction. I found it easy to withdraw into myself, or, worse still, to use the old gambit: "It can't be real" when I came face to face with an unpalatable situation. I had the impression that my, mostly, Hungarian girl friends and fellow patients had matured quicker than I. They were less afraid to meet life head on. Perhaps they questioned it less. However, that ever-present reminder of the inevitability of death in my environment, such as the suicide of one Polish woman and the sudden violent mental illness of another, offered quite another temptation as well: to get hold of life as I found it, and to live it unquestioningly and even recklessly. Sometimes I thought I could follow that path.

In the fall of 1946 I received permission to visit Eva in Stockholm, a day's journey by train. My first train journey since my liberation, I enjoyed each moment as keenly as if trains had never taken me to other, more terrible places. Eva and I were glad to be together. She had bought opera tickets and we heard Borodin's "Prince Igor." We paid a visit to an elderly couple from Hanover, the Hummels. They were quite aware of Eva's unhappiness and dissatisfaction but besides sympathy gave her little help. We were talking with them about our parents and their memories of them when Frau Hummel commented that our mother had been a beautiful woman. This greatly surprised me. I had never thought of her in those terms. And instantly I was back in Ahlem and recalled father's praise of mother's intelligence and musicality. I loved her, but even when I was a small child I felt critical of her tendency to dramatize and see disaster in minor events. I did not think of her very often. When I did, I thought that she had perhaps been fortunate to have died so young. She, whose life had more than its share of misfortune, would have appreciated the irony in that thought. If she had been lucky, that luck surely had been our misfortune. It was years before I surmised that she may have been the more realistic, down-to-earth of our parents. Though her judgment that we ought to leave Germany may have originated in her intense desire to be reunited with her own parents and siblings, it had been no less correct for that.

In December 1946 Grete came to Sweden to visit us. She was now a full-fledged nurse. We hardly spoke about the past. Together we traveled to Göteborg where Eva boarded the Gripsholm for her voyage to New York. Our Uncle Akos, father's half-brother and his married daughter had provided the necessary papers to enable Eva to join them in Brooklyn. That week of reunion was to be the only time since childhood Grete and Eva had together during our lifetime. Upon Grete's return to England she asked her friends to write me. She assumed that Eva's departure had left me lonely. One of Grete's friends, a young man who would soon leave England for the United States as well, began writing to me. My correspondence with him, at first a pleasant diversion, soon became an all-consuming interest. He wrote me in English which I had started to read, and after a few months, I too wrote him in English.

My health improved steadily. Despite the dire prediction by that physician in Halmstad, the pain in my chest lessened. In December of 1947 I said good-bye to my friends. I was especially sad to part from my roommate Zofia. We had become friends. But I could neither write Polish, nor decipher her Polish letters to me, and we lost touch. Now I had to leave the protective environment of the sanatorium to join Grete in England. My pen friend had meanwhile left Manchester to join his family in New York.

Then and Now

Father

When I think of my father I am certain he knew what lay ahead of him but that he nevertheless held fast to his faith in God. This was evident to us in all his expressions and actions during our time together in Theresienstadt and in Birkenau until the day we were separated from him. He never stopped being helpful to those in need. In Theresienstadt he found a place to hold weekly Sabbath services, and even in Birkenau he sang a shortened version of a Friday night service. But more than anything it was his complete lack of anger, remarkable in a man who was quick to anger, his quiet acceptance of his fate, that said to me that he was at peace.

Not until the summer of 1939 did my father seek help for himself from members of our Jewish congregation who had managed to emigrate. In the 1920s father had seen a great deal of poverty around him and had begun helping his fellow Jews. Then, in the 1930s, his funds helped mostly poor Eastern Jews with large families reach safety in Palestine. Since the archives of the Jewish community of Hannover are evidently lost, only his surviving daughters and his letters of that time can testify to his generosity. And still, he writes Margaret in the summer of 1939, almost everyone, especially those with limited means, “look me up at home”¹ before leaving the country. Even during that difficult summer, he refused no one his assistance. Regretfully, I must say that after the war I have never heard any one acknowledge our father’s help.

Aside from his deep concern for Margaret’s wellbeing in her strange English surroundings, two themes recur in our father’s letters: first, his desire to leave, his hope to find work to support himself and his wife--he stresses that he is ready to do any kind of work, no matter how menial--and secondly, no less important, his realistic fear that he will not be able to leave because the Gestapo intends to hold him in Hannover.

In another letter of late August 1939 our father speaks of needing the consent (Einverständnis) of the Schlägerstrasse (site of the Gestapo offices in Hannover) to emigrate. “My longing for you and the Little Ones is surely no less than yours for your father, especially since you are missing your dear mother. But, dearest Gretel, there is something you must, at your age, think about and understand. There have to be men who are ready to look every danger in the eye when the interest of the larger community demands it. In addition, and regardless of any danger to myself, I also have to remain here in the interest of the State (Staatsinteresse). And when such factors are in play, neither my love for you children, my instinct for life nor my personal wellbeing can take the place of this higher law which must take precedence and even replace personal consideration [...]” This strange statement, which seems to contradict his letters to Grete urging her to help him emigrate as quickly as possible, was written because he assumed that his letters were being read by the Gestapo. Now we know, because of the newly

¹ He uses the word: “Heimsuchen,” a pun for being both visited and hounded.

declassified documents in the main archive of Lower Saxony, that his assumption was correct.² The Gestapo did read his mail. These sentences were written for their benefit. He still expected that the time would come when he was no longer needed in Hannover. At that point he would be allowed to emigrate, “not a moment sooner.” [...] He clearly visualizes that liberating moment: “The preparations will be made in every detail.” “Then, with the consent of the Schl[äger]strasse, I shall buy my ticket, get on the train and leave.”

This letter tells me that our father knew that he was in a very precarious situation. He was aware that he was under close scrutiny by the Gestapo. War was imminent. It is possible that the phrase “the interest of the larger community” refers to the increasingly impoverished Jewish community remaining in Hannover and its difficulties, difficulties he shared and which he had mentioned in the letter quoted above. But he also twice plainly tells his daughter -- who may have wondered what he meant -- that if he is forced to remain in Germany, he will be facing (unspecified) dangers. And by invoking the Third Reich’s mantra: “The interest of the State”, he was reminding the Gestapo that he, a Jew, continued to be a conscientious civil servant. He knew that while Jews were expected to act in “the interest of the State”, the antisemitic literature of the time considered Jews constitutionally incapable of acting lawfully or honorably.

While he was seeing his chances for escape dwindle, and the Nazi regime was unveiling another series of antisemitic restrictions, he seems nevertheless to have clung to the hope that he still had a little breathing room left. In February 1940 he again wrote to Margaret to ask our relatives in Palestine and the US to help him and his wife emigrate. When in early November 1941, despite all his efforts, we failed to emigrate to Cuba, he must have lost his last hope of escape. A month later, shortly before the first deportation train left, this prompted him to volunteer himself and his family to join the majority of the remnant of our Jewish community on this transport to Riga. The Gestapo had other ideas. Their refusal to let him go meant that they still intended to make use of him. If father understood this, he bore it, as he always did, totally alone. He confided in no one. I have described how the years 1941 to 1943 turned into the worst years of our father’s life. He did not complain. We only saw a strangely silent, haunted man. But for his family it meant two more years in Hannover before we were deported in the summer of 1943.

and I

Shortly after our liberation in May 1945, I began to think about our father’s death and the events of the last years of his life. All the joys of our childhood had emanated from him.

² On August 24, 1939, the State Finance Office of Hannover warned the Police Commissioner, with copies to the Gestapo, the Investigative Branch of the Foreign Currency Office, and the Hannover branch of the Reichsbank that my father is suspected of wishing to emigrate. As grounds for the suspicion are listed: a passport application, reason for desire to travel: emigration. All those notified by this preprinted form were required to acknowledge receipt of the information and to return it to the sender. The legal basis for the warning were two Third Reich regulations to prevent “Kapitalflucht” (flight with financial resources) dating to 1936 and later.

His love and concern for his children had guided most of his actions. Even under the most terrible conditions he sought to protect us. Our stepmother was a good, attentive woman, but it was father who, in the last five years of his life, replaced our mother for Eva and me. It is very painful to confess that there was a time years ago when I felt, despite many reasons to think differently, that there was a kind of “justice” in father’s death. Now I think that even to have had this thought is, to put it mildly, unforgivable. This was before sociologists and historians began the debates of the 1960s of the alleged cooperation and collaboration by Jewish officials and Jewish Ghetto Councils with the Nazis. It was grounded solely in what I seemed to observe of my father’s attitude and what appeared to be his role vis-a-vis the Gestapo at the time of our return from Holland.

But ever since I began working with my translator on the German version of this memoir, I have been rethinking many of the events I have described. And I have learned a number of things about their sequence and history. A book, “Das Sonderrecht für die Juden im NS Staat” (The Special Laws for the Jews of the Nazi State)³ which I received from my translator helped me to see, in great and relentless detail, the hardships faced by German Jews during the nineteen thirties and forties. The documents that were put at our disposal in the summer of the year 2000 by the main archive of Lower Saxony did their part to reinforce and give solidity to my memories. They deal largely with the lawsuits my father was involved in. But some preliminary conclusions can be drawn from these themes which go beyond the subject of these particular documents. These documents and the letters he wrote to us in Holland in 1939 disclose a situation in which it became increasingly difficult for my father to continue to do his duty as a Jewish official to his Jewish community and simultaneously obey the onerous Nazi laws of Germany. Gradually these two objectives had to come into conflict. Three examples will suffice to show how these problems developed; in one case the seeds of the problem are traceable to the time of the Weimar Republic.

1) After the promulgation of the Nuremberg Laws in September 1935, my father’s work with the Gestapo to identify and catalog “mixed marriages” and their offspring, did not do these groups any harm. On the contrary, if he could prove that, at the cut-off date, someone was not a member of the Jewish community, and their children did not receive religious instruction, it actually helped because they were then not considered Jewish. Nevertheless researchers now hypothesize that eventually the Nazis would have sterilized the offspring of these marriages, the so-called “mixed breeds”.

2) The Nazis wanted the Jews to leave Germany. My father helped especially those in need to emigrate, both by asking wealthier Jews for extra contributions and, when the need arose, with his own funds. It goes without saying that, while it was a goal of the Nazis to rid Germany of its Jews, the lives of those able to leave the country were saved. In a similar vein, after the Austrian “Anschluss” in March 1938, Jewish organizations, such as the American Joint Distribution Committee, helped fund Jewish emigration so that there was no need to use German foreign currency reserves.

³ Walk, J. Heidelberg, 1996

3) Increasingly during the nineteen thirties the Nazis demanded that the funds and possessions at the disposal of members of the Jewish community be catalogued and registered. But, as I described earlier in this memoir, as early as the 1920s, at the behest of the president of the Jewish community and the members of the board, father worked at the Finanzamt to record the incomes of its membership. The purpose was to accurately levy the Church tax (Kirchensteuer) which was payable to the German State. Since part of that tax levy was returned to the Jewish Community (as to other religious institutions), it helped to shore up the finances of the Jewish community for its multifarious activities and its needy members. But by the nineteen thirties the Nazi regime did everything in its power to make it easier, even “legal” by passing special laws, to gradually rob their former Jewish citizens of all their property. By then, such earlier and expected cooperation with the German authorities, had to have become a matter of regret.

In 1938 the Nazis decreed that all Jewish organizations were to be folded into the Reichsvereinigung der Juden in Deutschland (the umbrella organization of Jews in Germany--they were no longer called “German Jews--). This seems to have taken a year to fully implement. It was the first step to concentrate the Jews figuratively under “one roof.” They lost their last vestige of independence, because their officials now came under direct control and command of the Gestapo.

Emigration was the only way out of that trap. When our emigration failed, my father seems to have resigned himself to his fate. That was the man I saw when my twin and I returned from Holland.....

Before our deportation, during the years 1941-1943 when I observed Father in actual contact with the Gestapo, I felt critical of him because of what I saw as his anxious compliance with their demands. Just watching my father in Ahlem as he hurried to cut the lilacs they were demanding from him was painful to witness, because the change in his behavior contrasted so strikingly with how I remembered him. His old-fashioned courtesy had served always to underline his natural dignity. Now it highlighted only his humiliation and compliance.

Did my father’s compliance constitute “cooperation”? Can one speak of cooperation when a choice of action does not exist? And if the term “cooperation” is applicable in my father’s case and in that of other Jewish officials in similar situations, we do not know precisely what this “cooperation” entailed and how it was achieved. The unprecedented nature of the circumstances in which these Jewish officials found themselves is impossible to judge or even to recreate with historical accuracy and fairness. Despite all the research and the many studies of the catastrophe that befell us, the various methods used by the Nazis to intimidate the Jews and force them to their knees, have not been sufficiently elucidated. These questions may find at the very least partial answers as the result of just begun research related to the newly opened files in the main archive of Lower Saxony and relating mainly to the Oberfinanzdirection (somewhat like the Internal Revenue Service).

While it will be possible to quantify how much property and other possessions the Nazis stole from the Jews in what one Hannover paper now calls the “Finanztod” (financial death) of the Jews before their deportation and likely murder or death, how do we quantify their suffering before they met their end? I believe that the degradation and the terror these Jewish men and women had to suffer constitute another part of this tragedy in which father and others like him were forced to play a role. I do not know with any certainty to what extent, and in what direction, my father’s work during those terrible years of 1941 to 1943 affected the fate of members of our community. The question of the deportation lists that has troubled me for close to sixty years could now be resolved, at least in the case of Hannover. At the moment of my writing it is still not certain, whether it was the Jewish officials or the Gestapo that compiled and handed out the deportation lists while the Jewish officials, like my father, had to notify the hapless Jews that their turn had come to be deported, as this was described by Klemperer in Dresden. What is documented is that the Gestapo had to give permission for any change in those lists. When I returned from Holland, not yet fourteen years old, I thought my father had to prepare those lists. I could not realize how powerless my father was to confront the evil that faced him.

Even so I saw how Father suffered: today that picture has become even grimmer because I have an inkling of what must have been his predicament. At the time the fifteen (or sixteen, depending on the definition) Judenhäuser (Jew houses) were established, a representative of the Reichsvereinigung briefly visited Hannover (Buchholz). But when the deportations began there was little or no opportunity for consulting with Jewish officials in other cities. They must have received the same or similar orders from the Nazi officials. “To pick up the telephone” was impossible. The fear that the Gestapo or their spies might be listening must have accompanied all activities. This isolation, which was planned and maintained by the Nazis, created a nightmarish atmosphere and prevented the formulation of any kind of perspective. We know today that Jewish officials acted similarly in other German cities, from the large community of Berlin to the small ones such as Hildesheim. The opinion of Rabbi Leo Baeck that Jewish officials would show more consideration than the Gestapo when they took the unhappy Berlin Jews to the collection points for deportation -- a decision to “cooperate” since real resistance was impossible -- is probably only the best known among many.⁴

Would my father have had greater freedom of movement if he had not brought Eva and me back to Hannover? That decision was of course connected to our failed emigration to Cuba, but in the end our return improved Eva and my chances of survival. The young family and their four small children with whom I had been living in Leiden for two years was deported from Westerbork and killed in Sobibor in March 1943. Eva’s family existed precariously underground. But our return to Hannover must have made life more difficult for father since it multiplied his family responsibility. Besides, we were a

⁴ Baker, Leonard, *Days of Sorrow and Pain. Leo Baeck and the Berlin Jews*. New York, 1978, p. 272. H.G. Adler, *Der verwaltete Mensch*, p. 356.

constant reminder that, despite much effort, he had not succeeded in saving us, just as he had not succeeded in completing Lotte's hoped for emigration to the U.S.A.

Today, for full-fledged members of a democratic society, it is difficult to assess the differences between our society and the Third Reich where repression and fear of informants largely ruled all thought and behavior. Even the state of democracy in the Weimar Republic is a topic on which honest historians differ. These different mindsets and their consequences cannot be stressed enough. While it is difficult to penetrate and understand the thinking of the Nazis and their minions, the thoughts and fears of their victims can only be guessed at.

It took many years until I managed to grapple with this story. Questions I did not even dare to think I shunned the longest: my father's presumed "guilt" and my dreadful feelings of shame to harbor such thoughts. But these evasions did not help me. Nor did the passage of time provide the necessary distance. On the contrary, my struggle to find words for this story has, if anything, brought those events closer again. The struggle with these conflicted feelings has always remained with me. Nevertheless, I can only stress that I never stopped respecting my father, to love him and to mourn him.

I too have at times doubted the value of my survival. To have survived in the close proximity to the death of so many has had a lasting effect on my life. At first it was a daily occurrence in the Family Camp of Birkenau for me to be witnessing an old woman in the throes of death. I seemed to be feeling what it must be like to be that person struggling with death. Then, with a sense of relief, I was able to pull away and remind myself that I was, after all, alive. But before long my relief gave way to a feeling of shame. Did I feel such relief after our father was gassed? I ask myself this question because there were almost two weeks of torment while we were anticipating being separated from him. We knew that after our removal from the Family Camp our father and all those remaining there would be gassed. And that is what happened. ---

A year later, in the Sanatorium in Sweden, there was new cause for shame when girls, former prisoners and no older than I, died of their tuberculosis. Only by reminding myself of the certainty of my own eventual death could I ward off my shame.

Not so long ago it occurred to me that on the 10th of July 1944 when the time came for us twins to be marched out of the family camp of Birkenau, neither Eva nor I made an attempt to stay with our father. We could have made a different choice: we could have refused to leave our father. I hasten to add that the words I am using do not describe that reality: we were not given a choice, but told that we were to assemble at the entrance to the camp -- which meant that the dreaded moment of separation had come. And we

obeyed as we always did and left. But at that point we could have refused to move and would most like have been shot on the spot. I cannot speculate how our father would have felt. My point is that it never crossed my mind to stay. I do not know about Eva. Neither father nor we had broached such a possibility during the last few weeks even though we knew that we would soon be separated and that father would be gassed. Instead, father spoke to us of our sister in England whom we were to join after the war. It took forty-six years for me to wonder what would have happened if we had refused to leave our father...

Eva

When I visited Eva in Stockholm in the winter of 1946, she told me that she had met two of our former camp mates. The younger one had been, at most, in her mid-twenties when she became second in command to the Lagerälteste (camp elder) in the large women's camp in Birkenau. It was a position of power and privilege. She was a dark-haired, thin woman whose features bespoke determination, and she showed little mercy for the prisoners who did not immediately understand what she wanted from them when she yelled at them. She was one of the very few surviving Jewish girls from Slovakia who had built Birkenau in early 1942. Her terrible experiences must have helped to harden and even brutalize her. In Stockholm she lived together with an older woman whom we had met in Reichenbach, and they supported themselves as seamstresses. This young woman, whose name I no longer recall, was shunned by many former prisoners who had known her in Birkenau. Eva and I decided to visit her. We did not think we should judge her. She deserved our sympathy.

Over the years, however, Eva became less tolerant. I found that, in many respects, our ideas and judgments evolved in very different directions. Her judgments of others were based on the moralistic standards she had set for herself, and I knew that I had not met them. I was certain she remembered my failure to speak up in Birkenau and judged me to have been a coward. Yet, because she had not succeeded in saving father, she seemed to derive no comfort from knowing that her courage had not failed her when she had tried to speak up for him..

Eva insisted that fate itself owed her compensation for her suffering and that, at the very least, she ought to be spared further pain. She brooked no opposition when I tried to dispute and assuage her frequent dark forebodings, and quite impersonal political developments threatened her with personal distaster. Years of psychological treatment gave Eva the tools to question her own motives and those of others. But instead of ameliorating her suffering, this treatment seems to have repeatedly evoked the traumas she had experienced. At the same time she lost much of the warmhearted generosity that had been so much a part of her. It was very difficult to speak about our common experiences. If we tried at all, we differed about almost all details. Neither could we agree in our judgments what aspects had been meaningful or what we had learned from our experiences. If Eva had recorded her memories of our experiences, as I have done here, she would have described them very differently. Thus the experiences of our

incarceration which could have brought us closer, instead created a gulf between us. I had my own problems. My struggle with my memories was not won easily, and I did not understand Eva's attempts to find peace by a different road.

Some of Eva's and my disagreements must have stemmed from, or harkened back to, our childhood strife. We never learned to talk about our past jealousies or rivalry for father's affection. And yet these feelings were mirrored in our relations because seemingly trivial subjects led to highly charged, even absurd, disagreements. Although we continued, until near the end, to have our reconciliations, we drifted apart.

The subject of our father and his actions soon became tabu. Eva had loved and trusted our father absolutely. Her disillusionment and anger at his final failure to protect her seem to have been equalled only by her pain at his death.

Fate did not accede to Eva's demands for surcease, and illness and other misfortunes came her way. Although she struggled mightily with inevitable disappointment and pain, these often overwhelmed her. Sometimes we hoped that her pronounced sense of humor and her ever ready repartee with which she negotiated her life, would help to sustain her. Finally she too had two talented children. But these new joys could outweigh neither old nor new pain. Her first attempts to end her life had begun as early as the 1950s. On July 12, 1973,⁵ while her children were away for the summer and her husband was on one of his business trips, Eva succeeded in taking her own life. It was the anniversary of the day our father had been gassed in Auschwitz.

It was evidence of her own determination and strength that she managed to overcome her problems long enough to have a family at all, even though her pain eventually defeated her. Perhaps understandably, she poured her memories and all her thoughts and feelings into her oldest child, a boy for whom she had the highest hopes on every plane of achievement. On March 8, Eva's and my birthday, less than nine years after his mother's suicide, David took his own life. He was twenty-four years old and a law student at Harvard University. I think that David, too, was a victim of the catastrophe that befell the Jews.

Today I know that Eva and I had more in common than we were able to acknowledge. Our striving for self-protection and healing took different forms, but sprung from similar roots. For a long time I considered our inability to confide in each other, to seek and give comfort, at least in part, responsible for her death.

⁵ The liquidation of the Family Camp in Auschwitz-Birkenau during which our father was killed took two days: July 11 and 12, since there were a total of more than 7,000 men, women and children.

The years between 1949 when I came to New York and 1973, when Eva committed suicide, were often very difficult. To build a new life without the requisite education or practical skills, to raise small children despite frequent doubt and despair required strengths that I was surprised to find in myself. It helped me that my husband stood by me as a faithful friend. It was a fortunate circumstance for me that he was a refugee who had managed to get to England days before the war broke out. His more “normal” past helped both of us. Eva’s husband, on the other hand, was a survivor who struggled with his own problems in addition to those Eva brought into the marriage. During much of that time my own difficulties were overshadowed by those of Eva. But with the birth of my own son and daughter I gradually learned that I had my own life to live.

Margaret

Faith did not die in our family. It lived on in the life of our sister Margaret. After some years of pursuing her career in several different branches of nursing, Margaret married a German Jewish refugee in London. Together they raised and educated two girls and two boys in strict Jewish orthodoxy, and her children and many grandchildren continue to actively practice their faith. After Margaret was widowed she resumed her nursing work until retiring some years ago. Since then she has become a licensed piano teacher and has been teaching young children the piano.

Conclusion

Today it is hard for me not to conclude that my experiences from 1939 onward were crucial elements in shaping at least some aspects of my later life, such as my reactions to new challenges. I would have preferred to assume that while these experiences were difficult, I would have been who I am no matter what. And I maintained this posture of what I now see as denial most of the time. It was my daughter Hannah who told me that she understood this denial first and foremost as my attempt not to concede defeat. “You wanted to deny the Nazis that final victory.” All I knew was that it was my aim to protect my children from the worst aspects of my experiences and from my negative outlook, a task difficult at best and sometimes impossible. My refusal to regard these experiences decisive for my life helped me not to feel bitter and shielded me from the guilt I bear. At the same time, it placed the burden of real or perceived shortcomings and failings in my adult life strictly on myself rather than on the unusual and disruptive circumstances of my youth. It was hard for me to reconnect to ordinary life, and to admit my desire for a modest share in it, and what success I had was interspersed by many difficulties. Sometimes I felt that my present reality was little more than a garment that I could slip off with some ease. My old habit of detachment provided a haven which I had to struggle to forego because close relationships were always threatened by fearful forebodings of separation and even death.

Only with my family could I find the consolation I needed--but it was my children who pointed out to me, by their more wholesome approach to life, how flawed and incomplete the life I was leading had become. But while I learned from them, it would be absurd to think that they did not absorb some of what continued to trouble me.

There are still times when I too use the absolute moral yardsticks of my childhood instead of the more forbearing judgments that so many situations, and especially the Nazi era, call for. Faith and doubt continue to be at war in me although it is the temptation of my childhood faith with its unkept promises I struggle against more.

I continue to brood about my father's life and to mourn his death and the deaths of those I have loved. My experience as well as my reading about the period have convinced me that the murdered millions could not have averted their fate. That is not to say that their fate was inevitable or that they were responsible for it. The responsibility for the suffering and deaths lies with those whose maniacal ideas unleashed those deeds. But it must also be said that part of the guilt for these events must be shared by those who were too slow, reluctant and miserly to avert them: the democratic countries of that era.

Primo Levi's Last Book

Since I first read Primo Levi's The Drowned and the Saved thirteen years ago, I have reread it many times and I still find it a painful task. Interestingly Levi used the same title for the central chapter of his first book, written shortly after his return from Auschwitz forty years earlier, variously called "Survival in Auschwitz", or "If this is a Man." In that central chapter Levi reports his critical observations of the behavior and survival strategies of his fellow prisoners, such as the young man he called "Henri."¹ The precision with which even as a young man he recorded his experiences in Auschwitz and his later writings have garnered him deep respect and affection. Levi has become an icon. At all times he describes even his worst experiences calmly and with scientific clarity. This holds equally true in his final book, and in his essay, "The Gray Zone," where his subject is that odd conglomeration of prisoners, the prisoner-functionaries (Funktionshäftlinge). These are the men and women who had been coerced by the SS to help run and administer the Lagers. There were not only many different Lagers, there also were many different prisoner-functionaries. According to Primo Levi, regardless of the circumstances, all shared two things: power and privilege. While neither term is without its problems, "privilege" is even more difficult to define in the Lager situation.

It should not be forgotten that not all prisoner-functionaries used their privileges for their own ends. And Primo Levi complicates matters further when he avers several times in this essay that undeserved privilege is by no means confined to the Lager, it exists everywhere in the outside world as well.

"The ascent of the privileged, not only in the Lager, but in all human coexistence, is an anguishing but unfailing phenomenon [...] It is the duty of righteous men to make war on all undeserved privilege, [...] this is a war without end." (p.42) On the page before Levi reminded us that the meaning of privilege can be grasped "[...] if we only want to understand what takes place in a big industrial factory." I think that by comparing the privileged and powerful of the Lager with those having these advantages in the outside world, Levi blurs a crucial distinction: Unlike the privileged in the outside world, those "obscene and pathetic figures [in the Lager]" (p.41), did not accept their functions freely. These were thrust upon them. Levi asks that only those who have lived in similar circumstances, and "had the opportunity to test for themselves what it means to act in a state of coercion," (p.44) be allowed to judge these prisoners. It is generally agreed that life on the outside is as different from existence in the Lager as night is from day. And, I would submit, even within the Lager, the vantage point of the ordinary prisoner differed greatly from that of any prisoner-functionary. An ordinary prisoner, exposed to one or more of the many injustices perpetrated by a Kapo--a particularly low and frequently vicious example of foreman-- would lack the strength of body and mind to understand

¹ "Henri", actually Paul Steinberg, who did survive, not long ago published "Speak You Also." A Survivor's Reckoning. Metropolitan Books, tr. Linda Coverdale, 2000, New York. Paul Steinberg was not quite seventeen when he was sent to Auschwitz. It is difficult to see the monstrous Henri in him, and painful to imagine what he must have felt when he read Levi's unmerciful portrait of himself. Steinberg readily admits to having more than anything wanted to survive.

what was being done to him. I agree with Levi that this was especially true at the traumatic moment of arrival at the Lager. And Primo Levi, even if he could not at first comprehend it, seems to have nursed for decades his memory of the offenses done to him at the time of his own arrival.

In camp I gradually came to understand that the differently colored triangles of these prisoner-functionaries did not necessarily describe the character of such men and women while indicating why they had been incarcerated. I am speaking here mostly of non-Jewish Germans who had been socialists or communists, or accused of consorting with foreign nationals and were marked with a red triangle. Or those with a green triangle: the convicted criminals who, after serving their sentences in a jail, were actually re-arrested and thrown into the Lager; and those with the black triangles of the so-called Asocials, and other assorted "undesirables" who might be sex offenders, prostitutes or possibly Sinti and Roma. Among those marked with the black triangle, many came from the lowest strata of German society whose poverty and unsettled family situation were likely contributing factors in their problems with the law. These functionaries' behavior differed greatly toward the ordinary prisoner, both when we arrived and later, and I was at the receiving end of both good deeds and vile misdeeds. What they did have in common were untold years of incarceration which seem to have had a very different effect on their actions and reactions to us. It was only after the war, by thinking about such persons and by reading about their experiences, that it became more comprehensible to me just how horrible and tragic their own Lager existence must have been.

There were many different kinds of functionaries, running the gamut from those with "real" power to those, such as myself, who as messengers had to run from one end of the Lager to another to deliver messages for the SS-guards. And there was, I believe, another important difference among functionaries. There were those, and I think many long-time prisoners were in this group, who had begun to adapt to, and probably even accept, their existence in Auschwitz and other Lagers as the only life they had, or were likely to have. Other functionaries saw their existence in the Lager as an overwhelming, but hopefully only temporary, misfortune. I believe it was such differences in attitude that influenced and even dictated their behavior, aside from the SS-guards who always stood above them and to whose orders both groups succumbed. It was that ultimate, absolute force whose decisive role Levi unaccountably slights. The first group was more likely to strive for some kind of success, be it in the acquisition of privilege or power, and satisfaction at any cost and of any kind. Levi dwells at length on the cruel reception he and other newly arrived prisoners were accorded by those old-time prisoners. It was probably that "adapted" group that could not tolerate being reminded of the outside world, and, concomitantly, of the losses they had sustained. Those newcomers had enjoyed the outside world years longer than they, and those newcomers had no inkling of the turmoil their arrival must have caused in the functionaries. The second group tended to retain the value system of the outside world and with it a better perspective on their surroundings. It was this second group that was more likely to look for ways of resisting their jailers. They knew that this was an environment of total lawlessness in which personal ambitions could only play a dubious part. The prisoners' prior political experience and education

may have been of some importance in this process of adaptation or resistance. Nevertheless it would be simplistic to sort these long-time prisoners into the usual political and criminal groups. Matters were never that simple in the Lager. But these differences in the behavior of the various functionaries were crucial for the ordinary prisoner.

To repeat, it makes little sense to judge the behavior of the prisoner-functionaries as an independent phenomenon since they were wholly dependent on those who had, always contingently and temporarily, ordered them to assume the power they wielded, namely, the SS-Guards.

No prisoner-functionary was more affected by the direct dictates of the SS-Guards than those chosen for the Sonderkommandos, mostly Jewish men who were forced to work in the crematoria, often at the time of their arrival when they were confused and ignorant of the environment into which they had been thrust. Levi rightly emphasizes that “conceiving and organizing the squads [Sonderkommandos] was National Socialism’s most demonic crime.[...] This institution represented an attempt to shift onto others--specifically the victims--the burden of guilt, so that they were deprived of even the solace of innocence. [...] In fact, the existence of the squads had a meaning, a message: ‘We, the master race, are your destroyers, but you are no better than we are, if we so wish, and we do so wish, we can destroy not only your bodies but also your souls, just as we have destroyed ours’” (p.53).

Despite Levi’s evident, profound insight into the workings of Nazi thinking, and his repeated warnings about judging “the crematorium ravens” in these extraordinary, inhuman circumstances, he himself does not refrain from making judgments. But his judgments are usually directed at the prisoner-functionary, much more rarely at the true villain: the Nazi perpetrator. Levi twice calls the Sonderkommandos “collaborators”, and speaks of their “acquiescing” in performing their grisly work. He speaks of them, and the Judenrat of the Warsaw Ghetto, moreover, in the same breath as Quisling of Norway and Vichy France and the Salo Republic of Italy. Was this not the moment to pinpoint the central difference between the decision of a Quisling to betray his homeland to the Nazis and any person in a Lager, plucked from among the masses to perform any work whatsoever? I have asked myself over and over again, why did Primo Levi, so scrupulously fair to even his Nazi tormentors, not see this? Did Levi fall victim to his own despair and shame (the title of his next essay)?

Some of Levi’s readers believe that what afflicted Levi was his rage, not with these prisoner-functionaries, but with those who appointed them: the Nazi jailers of that time. Levi rarely bothers to distinguish between “Nazi” and “German”: mostly he speaks of the Germans. The last part of his book deals with his long-time and extensive correspondence with an assortment of Germans: those who had begun to comprehend what had happened during the Nazi era and those who never did. Levi never fails to be courteous and attentive, but one has to wonder whether he attends sufficiently to his own feelings towards “the Germans.” That may be why he continued to show a kind of

forbearance toward the perpetrators that he does not consistently grant that most tragic group of workers of that time: the Sonderkommando.

Levi started his essay, "The Gray Zone" with the question: "Have we--we who have returned--been able to understand and make others understand our experience?" He does not answer that question except indirectly, and with evident bitterness. Those who survived, he believes, were the wily, who--to put it mildly--managed by hook and by crook to obtain more food than the others; the good were by necessity submerged. We, the survivors, all resemble Chaim Rumkowski, the compromised and compromising Ghetto Elder of Lodz, although his attainment of temporary power and privilege did not save his life either. In the final analysis it seems to me Levi believed that it is our flawed human nature that is ever to a greater or lesser degree "provoked by oppression" (p.61), and that such provocations are bound to recur. The essay's pronouncements give clear evidence of Levi's recurring conflict: to judge, or not to judge, as when he pleads that "we meditate on the 'crematorium ravens' (i.e., the Sonderkommando) with pity and rigor, but that judgment of them be suspended" (p.60).

Why is it that "The Gray Zone" holds me captive? While Levi and I lived different lives both before and after the war, and we had our different Auschwitz experiences, where he eventually worked as a chemist and I, being a twin, as a messenger, I too have had considerable difficulty dealing with my conflicts about the perpetrators and bystanders, the Germans of that time..

Over the years in every day experience I have often been told about a memory that a friend has long carried with him relating to a hurt or injustice inflicted by another human being. By most yardsticks these occurrences could be considered quite trivial. Sometimes this has caused me to ask myself: Since this is how people react to an experience of fairly minor injustice, how do you truly feel about what happened in the Lager, and about those that perpetrated these deeds? It is a question I have so far been unable to answer.

It is easier, because it is still within the common realm of human experience, to reflect on the different behaviors of one's fellow prisoners: their resilience or lack of it, their helpfulness, their indifference or cruelty vis-a-vis others or oneself. And Levi does it superbly in this and other writings.

But the concepts that lay behind the invention of the Lager are another matter, and Levi's analysis breaks down when he compares aspects of it to the everyday injustices of our common world. What lay behind that failure can only be guessed at. He may have seen the continuing conflicts and wars with their killings at numerous places in the world as proof of his personal failure to make the world understand what had happened and what it had allowed to happen. That disappointment could be the cause for his numerous allusions to the undeserved privilege and other injustices extant in the outside world. I, too, have occasionally thought that "the whole world is no better than a concentration camp." I, too, would have hoped that the English and the Americans had heard our cry

for help and had had the will to save more of us. And there continue to be such occasions: the world, on too many occasions, fails to convert its indignation at some slaughter in distant or not so distant countries into action. But at other times, the world shows its potential for both good and evil, with some choice for action available to us.

Finally, I believe it is an error to insist that there is only one morality, and only one right or wrong answer no matter what the situation. Under the extraordinary circumstances prevailing in the Nazi camps, both helpless prisoners and privileged functionaries acted, if they were still capable of something deserving that term, according to their own lights, which, in most cases, meant that their own survival was uppermost in their mind. That there were women who, when confronted with the demand to leave their child, refused to part from it and went with it to their death is beyond question. But when she arrived at the ramp of Birkenau, did my sister Lotte know what awaited her and her little boy? Precisely because of the circumstances in the Lager, such actions and reactions were never freely chosen. The coercive environment in which we existed puts into question the whole notion of the meaning and possibility of choice.

The Inexpressably Difficult Year

The recent declassification of the files in the main archives of the State of Lower Saxony in Hannover gave my family access to files that contain, among others, documents from Nazi judicial and financial authorities regarding my father's arrest in October 1937 for crimes against "currency regulations," and, related to this spurious accusation, many letters by my father asking for permission to financially support his mother in Palestine. Lastly there are father's letters dealing with Margaret's emigration and his final and unsuccessful efforts on his own behalf to leave Germany.

Aside from giving my memories greater precision, my father's letters confirm what I could merely surmise. The title of this chapter is taken from his description of the year of his legal problems in one of his letters to a German official at the Oberfinanzamt ("ein unsagbar schweres Jahr"). He was explaining to him why he should be allowed to make the necessary arrangements to provide for his mother's continued support. The letter reveals that my father spent the best years of his life shouldering increasingly greater, often self-imposed, responsibilities extending well beyond his work and his immediate family. And in the background is our silent mother, whom her husband could no longer have sheltered from the threats implied in the long-drawn out investigations by the Nazi authorities. That last year of her life must have felt like one long nightmare from which she could not wake. These concerns were entirely hidden from us children. Ironically, some of our father's difficulties were exacerbated by his almost visceral need to share with those less fortunate the material comforts he was working so hard to earn. He could not be happy if he had to be indifferent to others' needs. His personal asides in the letters to the Nazi authorities bear this out, but they also show him to be a man who is not afraid to show his displeasure when he has been treated unfairly by the Nazi authorities.

The documents from various branches of the Nazi's judiciary and the Oberfinanzamt (the Internal Revenue Service) are in many respects puzzling. It is as if they were working with two different dictionaries, one containing the language of the "Rechtsstaat" (State of laws), the other unmistakably that of the "Machtstaat" (State of power). Their tone varies from viciously defamatory, as can be seen in the quotes from the arrest warrant, to an eventual, complete exoneration of my father. But even in that final exoneration the judges felt it necessary to refer to him as a guest of Germany: they praise him for "having at all times sought to carefully fulfill the laws of his host-country." Their choice of the term "host-country" is a reminder that these were, after all, Germans officials of the Third Reich. At that time, September 1, 1938, our father was a citizen of Germany; he was not a guest, having received his citizenship in 1920. In a letter to another of these German officials, father refers to this "praise": he did not wish to object to being called a "guest" of Germany precisely so as not to offend against the hospitality that has been extended to him!

Now that I have reached an age where a single unbidden thought can strike terror in my heart, I must wonder: how did my father live and continue working during a year when fresh accusations reversed exoneration several times? We lived after all in the Third Reich where fairness toward Jews was the exception rather than the rule and being "convicted" and severely punished was highly likely?

The background and a bare outline of the "case" against my father

As early as 1910, the year after he found employment in Hannover, my father began to support his mother and stepfather. In 1914 the couple fled from Transylvania to Hannover, and his stepfather worked as a watchmaker. They stayed with him and later with him and his wife until they emigrated to Palestine in 1925. When they left, his stepfather gave him two small sums of money which father kept in a bank in Hannover

until 1929 when he opened an account in a bank in Zurich. Shortly after the elderly couple arrived in Palestine the stepfather died.

Simultaneously for a period of ten years, my father was helping our mother's parents, whose lives as elderly immigrants in Palestine could not have been easy. Nor did our parents neglect the many needy Jews in their Jewish community in Hannover.

In 1931 new German foreign currency laws were issued, and father registered the Swiss account with the German authorities. He also informed the Zurich bank that the account they were holding in his name was a trust account for his mother.

In 1935 my father received permission to send his mother 5 Palestinian Pound per month under the Haavara Transfer Agreement which the Zionists in Palestine had negotiated with Nazi Germany. The Haavara Transfer Agreement's primary intent was to foster emigration of German Jews to Palestine. Father was able to utilize that agreement for a period of thirty months.

Meanwhile it was becoming increasingly difficult in Germany to get permission for the use of foreign currency for any purpose. Nevertheless, in 1936, our family was able to purchase 5000 Lire for a vacation in the Dolomites; when they had 2000 Lire left over at the end of our month-long vacation, our parents returned it to the Reichsbank. This simple action was later interpreted by one set of officials as "a shrewd maneuver" while another set of officials considered it a sign of father's honesty.

In 1937 father made plans for a vacation in Switzerland. He explained to the authorities that, primarily for health reasons, he wished to spend time in the mountains. We spent four weeks in Buochs at Lake Lucerne, and father and Margaret visited a school for Jewish Girls in Bex-les-Bains where he planned to enroll her. Father also visited the Zurich bank in which he kept the account he was holding in trust for his mother.

In Zurich father was shocked to learn that a year earlier, in August 1936, the bank had opened an additional account under his name with a sum of money that had arrived for deposit. Father assumed that it had come from Palestine--but he was given very little information. By 1936 "currency smuggling" and similar crimes "against the State and its economy" were among the most dangerous accusations against German Jews. Father was well aware of the threatening situation this additional account created for him. As recently as January 1937, he had written to the German Reichsbank to report on the status of the Swiss account, adding "if the new currency regulations necessitate my offering this account to the State, please consider this letter as such an offer." The authorities' answer was that since the account was held in trust, there was no need to offer it to the State. While he taught Eva and me to swim in Lake Lucerne and took us by funicular and ski lift to frolic in the snow at the foot of Mt. Titlis, father must have been worrying how to avert the disaster this new account could create for all of us.

On August 18, only days after our return to Hannover, my father wrote the German Reichsbank's Foreign Currency Department, to report the appearance of that new account in the Zurich bank. "I value my reputation and do not want to be considered a man who acts to the detriment of the country that, not too long ago, he was still allowed to call his fatherland." Honesty had always been a guiding principle in his life and he intended to continue along that path. But while father was extremely worried that his trustworthiness might be questioned, he seems also to have been totally certain of his innocence. He spoke neither to our mother nor to a lawyer about these worries. Between August 18 and his arrest in late October, he sent several letters to the German officials with proposals for what were now two accounts, in a last attempt to avert the problem he clearly foresaw. On

September 28, 1937, he faced an interrogation by the authorities. What occurred at that interrogation we do not know. But on October 17, my father wrote with something like despair to the Oberfinanzpräsident with copies to the Foreign Currency Department of the Reichsbank. "After much thought I have become convinced that under my current circumstances, I will not be believed. I am therefore offering to the [German] State the account I have long held in trust for my mother, because I cannot bear being considered unreliable by you or any other authorities." And further:

"I, for my part, have had enough! Since I received the news of the second account in Switzerland, I have not had a quiet hour. The remainder of my vacation was ruined for me. I foresaw the current developments, and I thank my Creator that I nevertheless had the strength to report this matter to the Reichsbank, instead of asking the Zurich bank to simply cross this account off their books. I have had to sacrifice many things in my life to remain honest and do not wish to act differently during the remainder of it. That proof cannot be denied me in any event."

But the bank officials forwarded his letters and the information he was providing to the investigative branch of the Customs Office (Zollfahndungsstelle), and on October 29, just after our midday meal, several policemen arrived in our apartment in Lützowstrasse 3, and arrested him.

The gist of the eight-page arrest warrant states:

"The Jew Samuel Herskovits stands accused of having with premeditation withheld a foreign account on 1 June 1933 which was in his possession instead of reporting it and offering it to the State. This crime constitutes treason against the German economy (Verrat der Deutschen Volkswirtschaft). [...] He also made incorrect statements and used devious means to receive foreign currency in the amount of 2,230 RM." (This refers to his arrangement under the Haavara Transfer Agreement.)

"As a Jew Samuel Herskovits had obviously no interest in [...] offering the State his foreign currency account. He is a very intelligent and sly man who, for years, has worked behind the backs of the officials. He knows the foreign currency laws sufficiently well and knows exactly what he has let himself in for. Through exaggerated expressions in letters to the authorities he tries to show himself in a positive light and to emphasize his honesty."

"Every one of these crimes by the accused were premeditated. His behavior deserves no mercy whatsoever." The warrant was signed by two Customs officials of the investigative branch of the Reichsbank.

My father's first letter from prison to our mother sounded a reassuring, even humorous, note--it is reproduced in the first chapter of this memoir. On December 4, Iszo Bergner, a brother-in-law of our parents, came from Palestine to Hannover and testified that it was he who had sent the new money to Zurich. And in the evening of December 15, our father was released. We children were beside ourselves with joy to have him home. Our troubles were over! Little did we know that the Sondergericht (a Special Court, related to the notorious Volksgerichtshof) had freed our father because "they no longer suspected that there was any danger of his escape." But the accusation that he had obtained foreign currency by devious means still held. Nor did we children know that one week later their judgment was appealed by the Customs' investigative branch. It was only the first of several such appeals.

Hardly had our father been released from prison when he began writing letters to the Foreign Currency Branch of the Oberfinanzamt to get permission to separate those funds in

Zurich that constituted his mother's inheritance from her brother (a fact that emerged during the investigations), so that she would have direct access to them. I do not know if these requests were heeded. He knew he would no longer be allowed to send her money from Germany, and he still needed to secure his mother's existence.

On January 7, 1938 my father was forced to send a petition to the Oberfinanzamt. His own bank account in Hannover, containing a mere 4300 RM, had been confiscated by the Customs Investigative Office. Of this amount he explained he actually owed 850 RM: "I borrowed this amount to force myself to be more economical since in the last few years I gave away more money for charitable purposes than I could afford. Despite my own needs I could not refuse poor people or those who wanted to borrow money from me."

Our father was worried that his plans to send Margaret to study in Switzerland would come to naught. Amazingly, during the autumn of 1937, despite his legal problems, he had continued to work on sending her to Switzerland. According to his letter of January 7, he was also working to secure our retarded sister Klärchen's upkeep in the Catholic Bavarian institution where she had been since 1934. "My whole life I have taken care of others, and now when I must take care of my own children, I am being treated like a criminal! [...]" It is difficult to describe how large the need is in circles for whom no one wishes to be responsible. These people come to me and I must help them, otherwise I feel unhappy and even less able to enjoy my own life. I took the liberty to tell you a little of this because I was accused by one of the gentlemen [we do not know who] of being like Barmat and Kutisker [two Russians, perhaps Jews, who in the 1920s were accused of bribing high German government officials]. I would not expect Barmat and Kutisker to act as I did.."

In early March 1938 Dr. Georg Fraenkel, father's lawyer, wrote a seven-page letter to the District Attorney of the Landesgericht to refute his charge that he had obtained foreign currency by devious means, ("Devisen Erschleichung"). He explained that even if father had used the Swiss account to support his mother, it would have been depleted by 1935 when the Haavara Agreement came into play. In a second letter Dr. Fraenkel transmits, against his better judgment as he makes clear, my father's offer to repay those 150 pound sent to his mother between 1935 and 1937. The Nazis evidently jumped at the chance to get those totally undeserved funds, and the lawyer evidently angry with our father eventually charged father extra for his services.

It took until early September 1938 for the Nazi authorities to finally clear our father of all the charges. From the judgment of the third court to rule in the case, it emerges that all along the authorities had both the documentation in their files that my father had twice offered his foreign currency account to the German State, and their response and refusal of that offer because the account was not his!

The German State paid all court costs--except the fees of father's lawyer.

Did the outcome of these trials give my father the assurance that justice was still obtainable in Nazi Germany? Or did it, on the contrary, demonstrate to him what could happen if Nazi operatives suspected a Jew of having broken the myriad regulations and restrictions of Nazi laws? Did his six-and-a-half-week prison experience influence his subsequent thinking about the "country he used to be able to call his homeland?" I have no clear answers to these and other questions. But in January 1938, one month after his release from prison, father began work, that was to take more than a year, to send Margaret to England.

The time for feeling relief, if father felt it at all, was short. The document of exoneration is dated September 1, 1938. At the end of that month, the Munich Agreement, meant to avert a war, capped a year of retreat by European democracies in the face of threats by the Third

Reich. At the end of October 1938, the Nazis deported 17,000 Polish Jews to Poland. Little more than two months after father's exoneration, on November 9, the pogrom called Kristallnacht destroyed much of what our Jewish community, and thus our family, held dear.

